Metalsmith

Fall 1992
VOLUME 12
NUMBER 4
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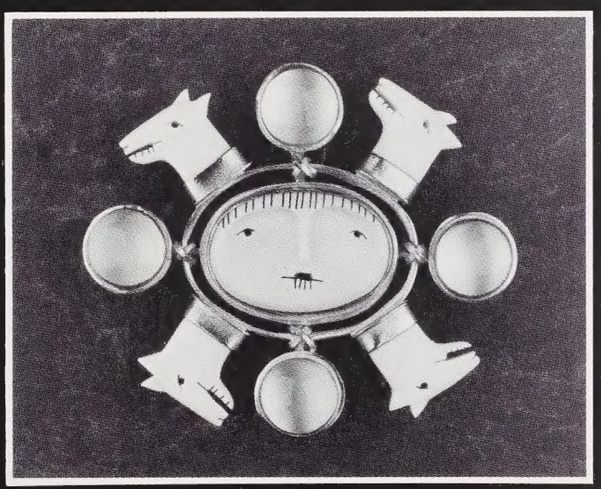
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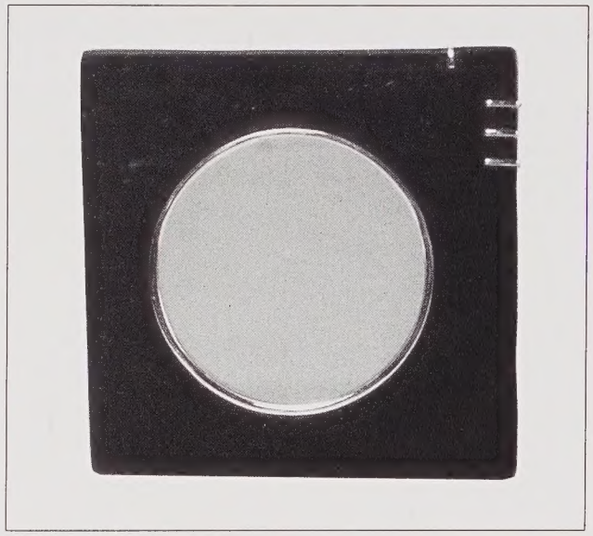

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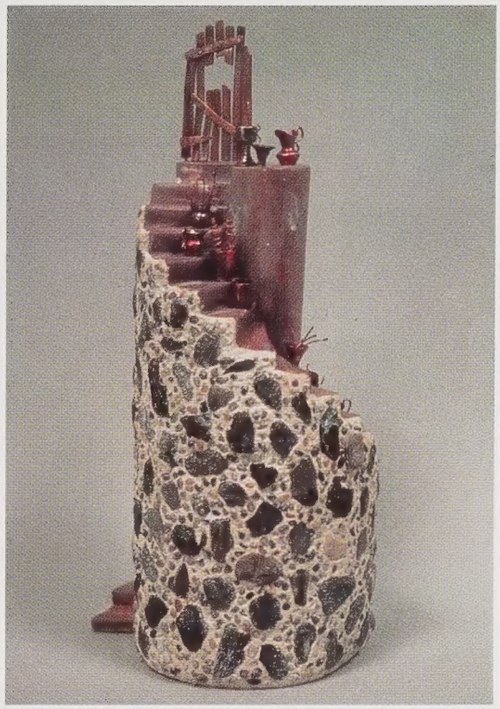

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Courtesy Helen Drutt Galleries, Philadelphia
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Editorial

This spring, while having lunch with a friend who is an independent curator, I heard a story that alarmed me. We were celebrating the news that an exhibition he is putting together had received funding. A private fundraising organization had obtained pledges from several corporate sponsors to underwrite the exhibition – which seemed like good news in this era of tight budgets and reduced support of the arts. Unfortunately, the money would not come without strings attached. The curator would have to sign an affidavit promising not to include any art that explored themes that could be considered controversial in a political, sexual or religious sense.

Such a demand seems to go well beyond the NEA's touchiness about funding anything that might be interpreted as pornographic. Now we're supposed to muzzle political and religious statements as well. The curator finds himself in a catch-22 situation. Only one piece can be considered remotely controversial, so he is tempted to agree to the terms. After all, an opportunity to curate an exhibition that will travel nationally and internationally doesn't come along every day or even every decade. But of course there is a principle involved, and signing such an affadavit is distasteful at best. At worst, it encourages more censorship by giving validity to the request. History has shown that those who acquiesce give strength to the oppressor.

The curator must also consider the question of who will determine what is controversial. Will some sort of corporate gestapo be sent to monitor his choices? Who will set the parameters and define the terms? The obvious answer is whoever controls the money. We'd all like to think we would "do the right thing," thumb our noses at the censors and refuse to sign. But life is rarely so simple. By being righteous, not only will the curator lose out on a job but, worse, the work of several unknown and little-known artists will not be seen.

What we have here, of course, is big business as Big Brother. Yet, without unfettered government grants, where are museums to turn for funding? Membership drives and entrance fees bring in "untainted" money but not enough for capital projects or special exhibitions. Wealthy individuals and corporations are the alternatives, and, being part of the private sector, they are free to set whatever conditions suit their own biases and agendas.

So first we have the government withdrawing support of art that might be considered pornographic (which seems to include anything that smacks of sexuality), and then we have corporations going one step further and refusing to support anything that is politically or religiously controversial. Museums and galleries, fearful of losing patrons and clients, hesitate to show art that is not "politically correct." After all, without patrons and clients they would cease to exist. Where is all this leading? The next step is all too likely to be self-censorship by the artists if they want to be shown.

Watch out, sinners. Here comes the millenium.

Since this is my final issue as interim editor, I'd like to close by introducing the new *Metalsmith* editor. Frank Lewis has taught at the university level for 12 years and at present is teaching contemporary art history and criticism at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee and the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design. (Frank's address is in the next column on this page.) Working on the magazine has been quite an adventure – sometimes difficult, sometimes enjoyable, often nutty, but never boring – and I'm glad I had the chance to meet so many of you at the SNAG conference. I look forward to following your progress in future issues of *Metalsmith.*

— VC

Metalsmith

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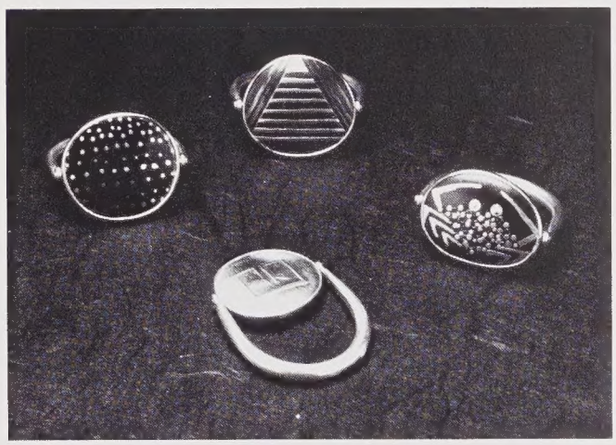

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Letters

Dear Editor:

"Profit by Design: A Profile of the Niessing Company," which appeared in the Spring 92 issue, has me worried. I hope that this article is not an example of changes we can expect in *Metalsmith*. It is hardly news to the readership of this magazine that there are alternatives to "polished gold, huge rocks and little blue boxes marked Tiffany." Actually, many of us make engagement and wedding rings ourselves! It makes me wonder just who the authors think we are.

The fact that Mr. and Mrs. Friedlich are in love with "their" engagement ring and "want to say something about who they are as a couple through their jewelry" seems to be the main point to this article. It is not about metalsmithing, about jewelry as art, about art or craft, design or any issue relating to them. It is a testimonial for a business, one that makes very expensive symbolic objects, as well as an endorsement of their symbolism. It reads like a stock prospectus for investors and looks like a six-page advertisement.

What might have been of interest is a detailed, informative article about the technical innovations perfected by Niessing, which are admirable and worthy of attention. An article about the tension rings, which are intriguing, or about the fusion of colored gold alloys that produces the beautiful airbrushed color effects would have been interesting. But technical information was sketchy. Who was this article written for? Is *Metalsmith* no longer a professional journal? Are we, as readers, assumed to lack the sophistication to understand or appreciate technical information?

The article claims that the company has a staff of 200, "employs 3 artistically trained designers and hires other artist-designers on a freelance basis." The "design team" (of three) is encouraged to be imaginative for one month (May), with little interference from management. But manager Jochen Exner, a business school graduate, explains that because "We are interested in making the Niessing design, not in making individual reputations," designs are attributed to the team as a whole. "We have artists working for us, but we do not make art," he says in another part of the article. Yet the authors come to the excited conclusion that "artists and industry share common goals." Since the company is not in business to make art, the goal of the "artist" must be the same as the business, to make a profit. Profitmaking is not what art, the Society of North American Goldsmiths or this magazine is about!

The authors also conclude, "The door to public acceptance, closed so tightly to most contemporary jewelers, has been opened a crack" by this company. If the goal of artists is to make a profit, it is hard to guess what the authors mean by "contemporary jewelers" or just what "public acceptance" they are referring to. This company, like many others that make jewelry, is in the business of exploiting and promoting cultural stereotypes for profit. This works directly *against* artists who make jewelry. Jewelry cannot gain public acceptance as art until this is understood.

The authors do not mention the Niessing catalog, which illustrates clearly what it is that they are selling. A woman of color is pictured without clothing, her skin covered with droplets of water (or is it the sweat of a "primitive woman"?). Another woman wears exotic non-European clothing, one appears with her clothing ripped open, and another is posed in a sexually provocative manner. Do these women look as if they are "expressing themselves through jewelry," as the company claims? Niessing sells jewelry by promoting and reinforcing cultural stereotypes of women as objects for male consumption, with jewelry as a prop (see my article, "Jewelry: It's Not a Pretty Picture," *Metalsmith*, Summer 91.) Niessing is no different than any other jewelry manufacturing company that advertises in this way. Good design, technical wizardry and being in "Europe's leading avant-garde exhibitions and galleries" do not change that fact.

Articles published in *Metalsmith* should reflect the general purpose of the Society of North American Goldsmiths and be consistent with the purpose of the organization. As stated in Article II of the Constitution, "The society is formed for educational, scientific, technical and aesthetic purposes concerned with fostering and encouraging goldsmithing, to gather information vital to the artist and teacher, and to spread these ideas and information throughout the creative community."

Susan Kingsley, Carmel, CA

Dear Editor:

For years I have picked up copies of *Metalsmith* magazine at the bookstore, only to be disappointed by the contents or put off by some weird editorial bias. The Spring 92 issue is a refreshing change – please continue what you have started. The magazine has terrific potential to be a source of creative and technical ideas and innovation. The articles in the current issue are all well written, and the technical article on Kum-Boo was very well illustrated and easily understood.

This is the kind of journal I value and enjoy reading, and to support the editorial change in *Metalsmith*, I have enclosed a check for membership in SNAG. Please start my subscription to *Metalsmith* with the next issue.

Dr. John E. Heldridge, Edmonds, WA

Dear Editor:

It is with some reluctance that I submit this response to Bruce Metcalf's article under "Recent Sightings" on the Neo-primitive in the Spring 92 issue. My reluctance stems from fear that this may be perceived as a rebuttal, whereas, in fact, I agree with much of what Bruce has said. But it is because of something of a personal affinity to "neo-primitive" metalwork that I feel somewhat responsible for responding.

Although my work for the past few years has taken a different direction, some people still remember me for pieces I produced from 1972 through 1980 which not only could be considered "neo-primitive" but were specifically referred to in an *Artweek* review in 1975 with the somewhat less complimentary term "neo-barbarian." And, of course, I was not alone in the use of this kind of imagery at that time. William Harper, Robert Brunya, Gary Noffke and even such notables as Brent Kington, Albert Paley and Bob Ebendorf were producing work that was obviously influenced by non-literate cultures. But Bruce is quite perceptive in asking questions about why this occurs and in being critical of the artistic expressions which result. I guess my uneasiness about the article comes from a concluding statement Bruce makes that "every generation forms a minority that rejects the illusions of modern life and embarks on a search for a more genuine experience." *Letters continued on page 50*

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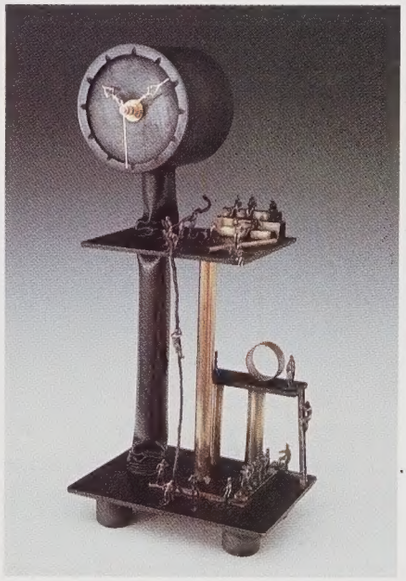

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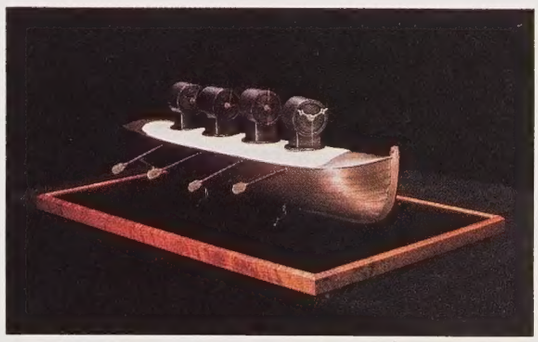

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Recent Sightings

by Bruce Metcalf

Standards

It has been more than 5 years since Ettagale Blauer proposed that "being wonderful, decorative, and salable" could be adequate criteria for judging jewelry.[1] We can safely assume that she was talking about market-oriented jewelry and not exploratory work like the "New Jewelry" that appeared from Europe early in the '80s. We can logically add that good jewelry should also be conveniently wearable and durable, as Garth Clark pointed out two years ago.[2] These positive qualities were accepted without debate, and so far a better list of criteria has not yet appeared.

What should be expected of good, marketable jewelry? Certainly it should be appealing to its audience, and it should function as a successful accent in the overall design of clothing and ornament on the body. That covers "wonderful" and "decorative." And from the point of view of good business management, it's a sound idea to produce work that will actually sell. Nor will anybody argue that this type of jewelry should attach to the body unobtrusively and should stand up to normal handling. But the more I think about these criteria, the more they seem to describe not a standard of excellence but a medium level that any competent designer and manufacturer should be able to achieve. Jewelers should be sophisticated enough to pass all five of these criteria without breaking a sweat.

Jewelry teachers will immediately point out that marketable jewelry should be designed well. The word "design" is used in two different senses: first, in the sense of mechanical design; second, as the innovative organization of visual elements. This implies that good jewelry function flawlessly at the physical level and also that the composition avoid familiar solutions. However, there seems to be some wiggle room here: some traditional designs – especially mechanisms – are just so good that it makes no sense to abandon them. For instance, very few jewelers would choose to invent a new joint and catch mechanism every time they make a pin.

At this point jewelers get caught up in one of the central debates about Modernism. For more than a century, a primary value in the art world has been invention. We were told that a new solution is inherently better than the old solution, partly because the old solution was generated by the outmoded (and sometimes destructive) ideologies of the past. While this kind of thinking fails to persuade anybody these days, another argument for innovation remains harder to refute. When designers face a choice between utilizing a traditional design and having to invent a new one that is as good or better, they must expend far more effort to propose the new design. Modernism respects the effort and rejects any reflexive easy choice.

What you have is a clash between two cultures. One group concludes that the "old ways" are invariably the best ways and that anybody who proposes alternatives is mindlessly pursuing mere novelty. The other group holds that all traditions are open to interrogation, that creative solutions are both possible and desirable, and generally that innovation is a positive value in its own right. They would claim that certain solutions are so obvious, or so overexposed, that a good designer will not use them. The two cultures shift the debate to peripheral issues like function versus art, but the real conflict is about how respectful jewelers should be about the past. (And what, in fact, *is* the past?) The conflict also extends to a view of the present: do the tastes of jewelry buyers represent an obstinate resistance to change or authentic expressions of need?

What else can we expect? In North America handmade jewelry is produced against a background of industrialization, and any assessment of quality must consider this relationship. When mass production can do so many things more efficiently and at less expense, why bother to make the thing by hand? What can be done with the handcrafted object that the manufactured object cannot accomplish? One jeweler who consciously exploits the inherent advantages of hand production is Michael Good. His hammered earrings are made from thin sheet metal and are therefore light and easily wearable. If the same design were manufactured, the earrings would have to be cast, making them considerably heavier. In this case the hand process is plainly superior to the industrialized process.

Handcraft also accommodates very short (or one-of-a-kind) production runs, which offer several competitive advantages. Handmade jewelry can be designed for a very small audience, which can serve niche markets that industry is incapable of reaching. Joel Bagnal, who used to run a custom jewelry shop in the Boston area, offered an insight to how limited production impacts on a type of quality. He pointed out that the jeweler provides a service to his clientele in that he can make a piece that uses imagery of special importance to the buyer. In responding to his client, the jeweler can design personal meaning into the object, which a mass-produced ornament could never have. In a very real way the jeweler gives a voice to his client, and often she is very grateful.

Seeing jewelry as speech is a useful analogy. We all know that jewelry is a form of communication, representing the persona of the wearer. We also know that mass production offers only a rough, generalized form of speech, not tailored to individual needs. One of the most profound potentials for jewelry is in the way it can act as a receptive screen for the projection of meaning. Cara Croninger is a production jeweler who designs her work to accommodate meaning. While her pendants with hearts and stars might seem trite to critics who demand innovative imagery, many of her buyers find those symbols to be perfect markers for personal events. Cara tells the story of a woman who meditated on a heart pendant during labor. The pendant became more than mere decoration, but an intimate symbol of the birth of a child. Jewelry can transcend the status of commodity and serve as a vehicle for authentic meaning. This service is not examined enough, and we understand it poorly.

Reflection of tradition, vehicle for invention, servant of human need: these are some of the aesthetic functions that jewelry can perform and some of the ways by which jewelry can be judged. There are other uses and standards yet to be articulated. Unfortunately, until jewelers and their customers begin to talk and write about these qualities, our understanding of jewelry remains stunted. So, please, all of you jewelers out there – start telling the rest of the world what you know.

Bruce Metcalf writes a regular column for Metalsmith.

[1] "Opinion: Soul Searching at 7000′," *Metalsmith,* Winter 1987.

[2] Friedlich and Mitchell, "The Closing of Doors: An Interview with Garth Clark," *Metalsmith,* Summer 1990.

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SNAG '92

The Society of North American Goldsmiths Annual Conference

Providence, Rhode Island

June 17 - 20, 1992

by Matthew Hollern

The SNAG conference convened this year with an agenda entitled "American Metalsmithing: A Diversity of Intent," and diverse it was. The 1992 conference included lectures and slide presentations that were well researched and professionally presented but did not make up an agenda of any discernible intent. The selection of presentations was markedly different this year, with the obvious absence of technical papers and retrospectives.

Jan Yager led off the conference with a discussion of her education at RISD under John Pripp, her introduction to industry and manufacturing technologies in Providence and her own successful business. She closed with an appeal for artists to interact with industry, for "one percent for the arts" within industry and for greater advocacy for art education. Yager was a late addition to the agenda, replacing David Macaulay, author of *The Way Things Work*. The next presentation, Carol Green's graduate thesis on "Souvenir Spoons of the 1890s: Artifacts of Popular Culture," used spoons to discuss the material culture of the period.

Edward S. Cooke, Jr., presented "Beyond Style and Technology: New Perspectives on American Silver 1870 - 1920," a very well documented discussion and refutation of the theories of Ruskin and Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement. Cooke discussed the importance of understanding the object within its own context and argued that there was a coherent and logical progression of styles led to by the return to mechanization of the 1920s.

Alfred M. Weisberg gave a very entertaining history of Providence, from the triangle of trade (molasses-rum-slaves) and the acquisition of wealth, to the arrival of silversmiths and the evolution of Quaker Providence, to the jewelry manufacturing capital that it is today. He also gave a brief and funny history of the "Gods of Goldsmithing."

Jeannine Falino of the Boston Museum of Fine Art discussed American silver between the wars. Her presentation emphasized the firms that stayed in business during the period and the reasons for their success. The discussion of the manufacturers, industrial designers and machine technology demonstrated the ability of firms to succeed by feeding on the ideas generated by the individual. A case in point was Chase Brass and Copper's rip-off of the 1934 Saarinen spherical coffee urn.

In the continuation of the Emerging Artists series from past conferences, a student slide show was presented to showcase the diversity of work from the student sector. It was organized, juried and presented by students from the Northeast. The work was innovative, well made and beautifully presented through image melts backed up by an instrumental soundtrack. It would have been complete and perfect had subtitles been used to allow the audience to know the name of each artist.

Joyce Scott, a performance artist and sculptor, was the most original addition to the traditional SNAG agenda. She combined performance and podium to deliver a potent presentation on three generations of Afro-American artists. Her songs, stories and slides distinguished her lecture as a performance piece.

In a crush of bad scheduling, the final afternoon ran 3 hours straight through, taking much of the punch from three of the most significant and influential lectures. Beverly Penn's presentation of "Narrative in Contemporary American Metalsmithing" was a very thorough examination in three parts: allegory, series, and words/text and images. It included discussion of the work of Fred Woell, Bob Ebendorf, Bruce Metcalf, Susan Hamlet and many others. Penn spoke of the resurgence of narrative and many artists' return in recent decades to life as a source for art.

Sean Licka's anticipated paper, "A Critical and Historical Look at *Metalsmith* Magazine," was disappointing. The use of slides of *Gold Dust, Goldsmith's Journal* and *Metalsmith* covers was an unnecessary distraction to a demanding presentation. Moreover, the topic deserved a forum for discussion beyond the interpretation that Licka presented. The presentation would have been much more effective as a panel discussion with Licka as presenter and moderator. When the floor was opened to questions and comments, only one was made. It was an opportunity lost to involve the membership in an important subject.

Jan Brooks Loyd, speaking on critical inquiry in the crafts, called for divergent forms of discourse, interdisciplinary discussion and the breakdown of boundaries between design, technical, intellectual and critical points of view. A second important subject lost its punch and potential due to bad scheduling. Loyd's paper would have elicited more response had it been scheduled in an earlier slot of greater length. She too could have benefited from the presentation/panel discussion format.

While the lecture series suffered from lack of direction and good scheduling, the always popular tours and exhibitions benefited from the resources of Providence. The Fortunoff "Silver: New Forms and Expressions III" exhibition was again held in conjunction with the conference. This year's show was more polarized in quality than the previous two and included recent works by metalsmiths from six decades. A reception at the Rhode Island School of Design museum was held to view the Gorham Silver Collection, an exhibition of over one thousand pieces, including a 740-piece dining service. Donald Friedlich organized a series of tours of the jewelry manufacturers for which Providence is famous. One tour featured a comprehensive walk-through of B.A. Ballou and discussion of the manufacturing of finished jewelry, findings and their facilities. The tour also included a stop at the Providence Jewelry Museum and demonstrations at the plating laboratories of Technic Inc., where a recently developed noncyanide bright silver was presented.

Part of the reason that the conferences are well attended is the occasion to get together with colleagues and friends and enjoy the program. It is an effective means to bring the membership together, exchange ideas and gather information. It is also a forum to promote discussion and accomplish specific goals. Each year we have the opportunity to discuss the state of the field, education, new technology and commercial practices, and too often we don't. It appears that we lay the burden of determining the emphasis of each conference on the party who volunteers to host it. Conferences would be of greater significance and influence were they held with the intent to accomplish something specific, as political conventions are held to establish a platform. Too often they are like turning on PBS without looking at the TV listings; you know the program will be educational, but you don't know what it will be about.

Matthew Hollern is an assistant professor of metals and jewelry at the Cleveland Institute of Art.

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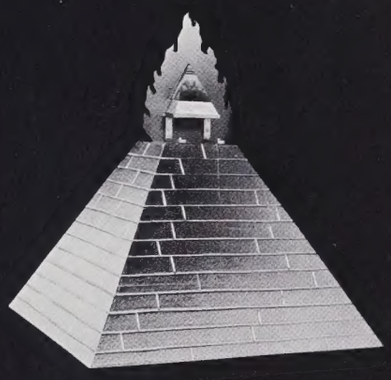

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The Visual Diaries of

Lynda Watson-Abbott

by Dorothy Spencer

Some people keep written diaries, others carry a camera, while others use the latest in video technology to record their memories. Then there's Lynda Watson-Abbott.

She does keep photographs, postcards, rocks, bits and pieces of metal and glass, papers, small sketches and notes – all kinds of paraphernalia, scraps of ephemera, reminders of various experiences and travels. All can be found on walls, in drawers, stashed on shelves, and stacked on countertops in her studio in Santa Cruz, California. It's her own private library, a repository of inspiration for future reference.

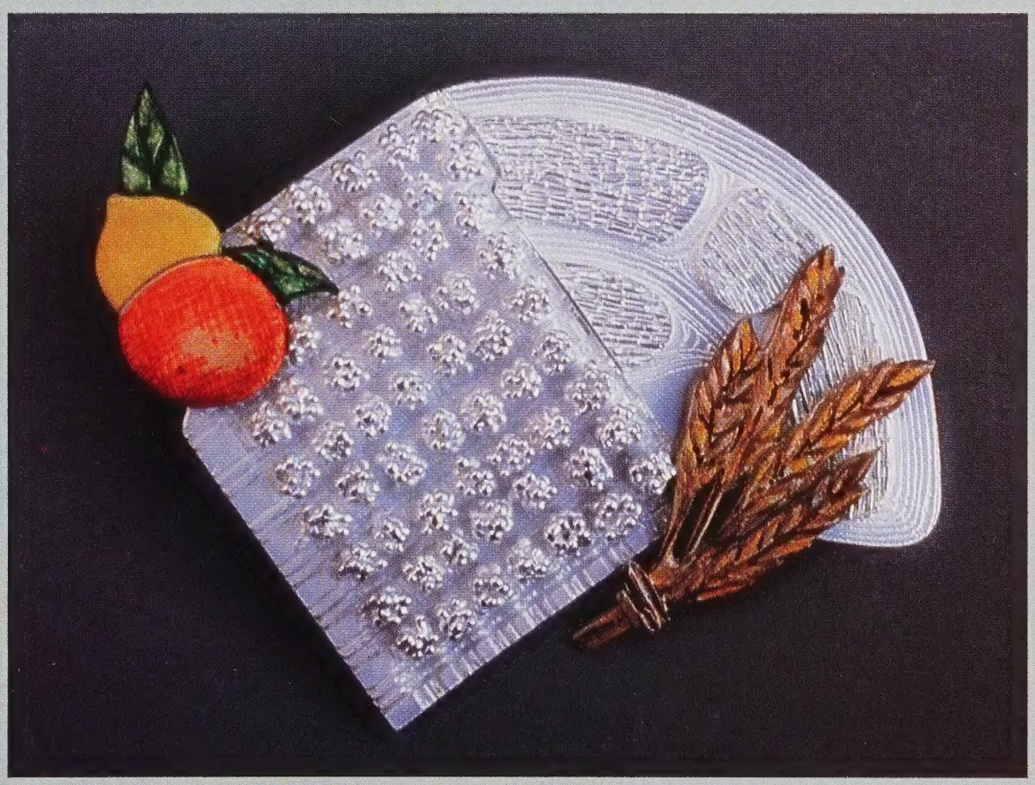
But, unlike other people who gather their memorabilia and put it into scrapbooks, photograph albums or tape libraries, Watson-Abbott translates her memories into small, delicate brooches and miniature sculptures – and lately, into an even newer mode of self-expression. They tell "stories" that are filled with imagery of how the artist perceives the world around her – comparisons and contrasts, her own look at life and all its adventures. These stories and personal observations range from small incidents to reflective views on topics as diverse as technology versus tradition; from short day trips to 11,000-mile drives across the United States; from travels in Japan and Mexico to the houses on her street. "These are my visual diaries," the artist points out.

Each trip has inspired a different series. In her *East/West/North/South* series, Watson-Abbott juxtaposes symbols of various places to explore the contrasts found in the American landscape. These small brooches are images mixed and matched, resulting in often humorous and always perceptive visual ruminations. In *North/South/MN/AZ,* a miniature citrus grove reminiscent of those spread across miles of southern California sits adjacent to linear fields of Minnesota wheat. Etched in sterling silver with permanent markers for emphasis, green-leafed orange and yellow fruit frame the grove just as a golden brown shaft of wheat underscores its ridged field.

The symbols that frequent many of these pieces not only reflect the artist's personal recollections but also offer the viewer a sense of awareness – of a familiarity of place. In *East/West/NE/NM* the customs equated with two such diverse areas of the country as the southwest of New Mexico and the New England coastal plain of Cape Cod are combined imaginatively. Sterling silver clapboard eaves provide a background for cut-out silhouettes of buoys; a three-dimensional sea-blue and gold painted buoy hangs in front, while a stippled slice of sterling silver wall suggesting southwestern stucco abuts the clapboard; a hanging string of red-painted chili peppers completes the piece.

A sterling silver lighthouse tapers to its base, only to rise again as an oil derrick; the Jefferson Monument's mirror image becomes a southwestern adobe oven; the graveyards of New England are counterbalanced by the skyline of Dallas. All are innovative ways of seeing. Although they are very much the personal statement of the artist, they are presented in such a thought-provoking style that it is easy to understand why viewers are taken by them. Highly imaginative and beautifully crafted, only their humorous insights keep them from becoming too pristinely serious.

CA Nightlights – Irvine
drawing with frame
pencil/graphite on paper
frame: pewter over wood
12 x 14½ x 1¼", 1992



North-South, MN/AZ brooch
sterling silver, permanent markers
3⅜ x 2⁹⁄₁₆ x ⅜", 1987

With each new series Watson-Abbott has altered her style of presentation. In the *Times and Places* series the pieces are less recognizable, more abstracted; the symbols incorporated into them are even more personal and less representational than those in the previous one.

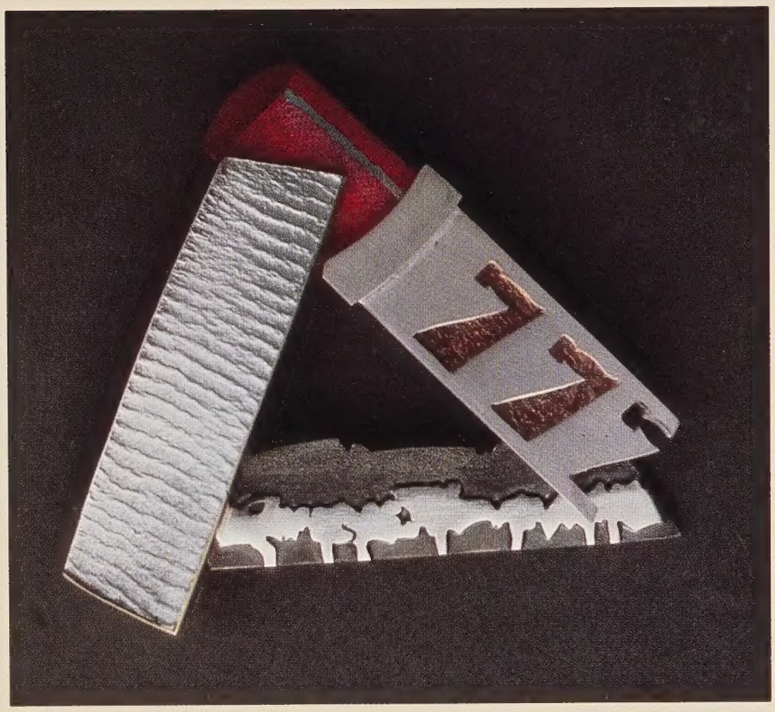
In *Times and Places – Reno,* one edge of a skeletal triangle has three 7s cut from its center, a reminder of the artist's $100 win in a 777 slot machine jackpot in Reno. A trilobite found in a small store along Highway 50 in Nevada has been worked into a wedge of fine silver. The colors of permanent markers echo those found in the landscape. Small pieces are based on minor incidents – enjoying a picnic in the Rockies, seeing lava beds for the first time – fragments of memories replicated in sterling, semiprecious stones and assorted metals.

In the spring of 1987, Watson-Abbott took a sabbatical from teaching and traveled to Japan. The country provided her with a new opportunity to rethink the direction of her work. The result was a series of small sculptures that focused on the extreme contrasts often found in that country. "I was fascinated by the fact that tradition and technology live side by side and that nobody notices or even thinks about it. For instance, you see people dressed in traditional kimonos riding on lightning-fast trains – or a tiny confection stand built from bamboo sitting adjacent to an amazing high-tech lens store."

From this perception come such unexpected pieces as *Japan – Tradition/Technology #3,* a miniature picture framed in the Japanese style. Its surface, instead of reflecting a traditional landscape scene, shows a photo-etched vision of a compact stereo. In another, *Japan – Tradition/Technology #2,* a sterling silver state-of-the-art television set sits on a pseudo Japanese stand, its screen wrapped in strips of traditional fabrics and silk cords.

Although her pieces average only 2 to 3 inches in length and usually less than 2 inches in width, the artist draws every shape before translating it into metal. "I draw everything again and again and again. For every piece that gets to metal, I probably make 15 to 20 sketches that I don't do." But once she has decided upon a design, then the piece is fabricated. "I start with metal, sheet and wire, then build." Some of the pins have cast parts, depending on what shape she needs.

Even though she likes working with gold, Watson-Abbott works almost exclusively with fine silver. "It's almost white and provides the perfect background for adding colors." She often uses permanent markers to add color and emphasis to parts of her jewelry. "I also like the color in and of itself, and in combination with such base metals as bronze, copper and brass." While some dealers prefer their artisans to use more precious metals, Lynda uses whatever it takes "to enhance my work – after all, it is my personal statement," she explains. "I never liked the idea of people telling me what would sell and what I needed to do in order to sell my work. I feel I've bought my freedom from those problems by teaching." She teaches full time at Cabrillo College outside Santa Cruz.



Times and Places – Reno brooch
fine and sterling silver,
18K and 22K gold, permanent markers
2½ x 2 x ½", 1986

Japan – Tradition/Technology #2 sculpture
fine and sterling silver, 22K gold,
brass, permanent markers, wood stand
4 x 2½ x 2½", 1987

Her pieces have on occasion been accused of being too personal. "My work is very narrative. The idea that I'm trying to get across is very important to me." Although Watson-Abbott's main concern is with her own vision, she has listened to the suggestions of dealers on occasion. "I recently had a dealer in Los Angeles ask me to create some pins that people would really want to wear. I decided to design a series of houses. I thought people would respond to houses and structures," she explains, pointing to a group of pins of intricately designed buildings, so exacting in detail that they resemble architectural models complete with exterior landscaping.

The small scale (averaging 2 x 3 x ½") and remarkable craftsmanship make these pieces universal in appeal. Among them are a Massachusetts log cabin complete with Adirondack chairs on the front porch; a typical California bungalow; a house trailer surrounded by a thicket of junipers; New England clapboard cottages; Santa Fe adobe houses. She does not need a camera to catch the intricacies of design and scale – she has a most discerning eye.

"Many of these come from what I see as I take walks around my neighborhood. I pass these houses in the evening and sometimes make up stories about what's going on inside. They reflect my thoughts as much as my observations."

A trip taken in the summer of 1991 became the impetus for Watson-Abbott's radical change in style. "Last summer I stopped doing jewelry and began combining drawings and graphics with metal. It's a new interpretation of what I've been doing all along. For years I've wanted to find some way to include graphics and drawing with the metal. This new way of working feels very comfortable. I am very excited about it – it's fun for me and I can see it going on indefinitely."

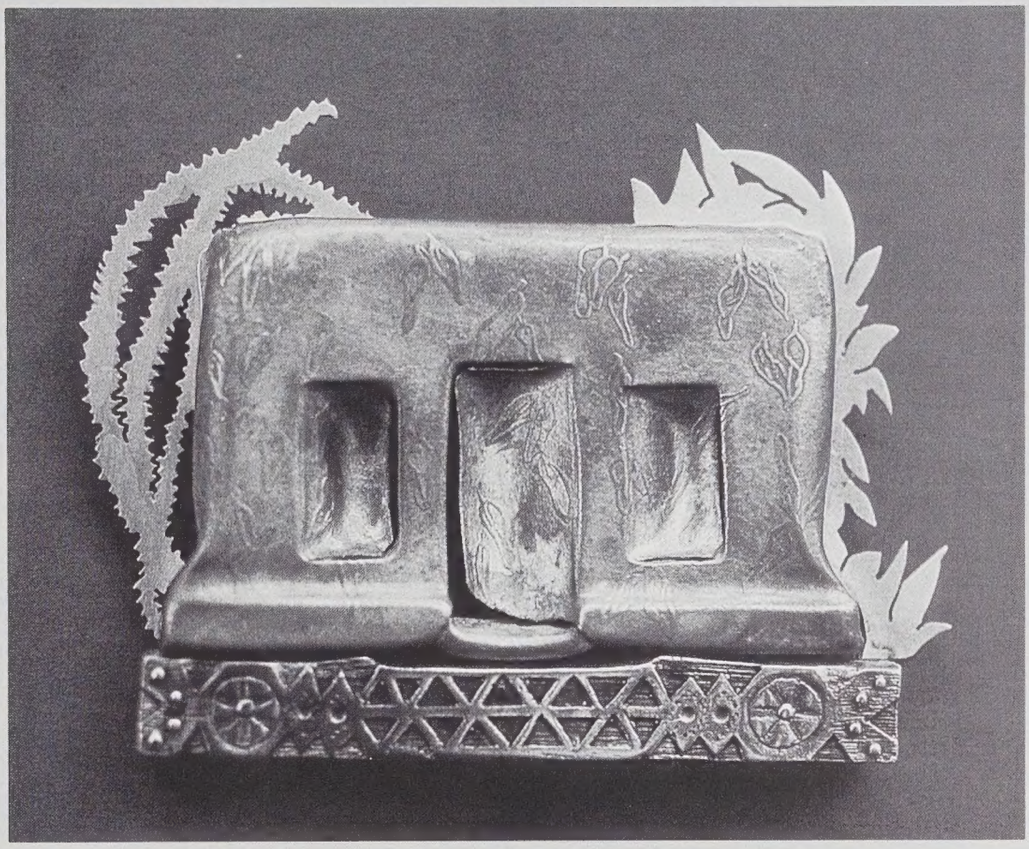
Not quite collages, not simply drawings in frames, these new pieces have allowed the artist to express herself more directly. "I've spent my whole life trying to break things down to make abbreviated statements that end up not really satisfying me. And not getting what I want to come across." Now all that has been altered.

She began the pieces while she was staying with friends in Mexico. She started by drawing parts of the house and then replacing parts of the drawings with objects. Each picture's frame became a continuation complete with the same bits and pieces that she used in the drawings.

In *Como? "Flecha Amarillo"* a Prismacolor pencil drawing of adobe lean-tos covered with vegetation reflects the warm earth colors of the Mexican landscape. The wide wood frame is covered with brass cut-out objects, the artist's own milagros; a religious figure sits at the top center of the frame as if blessing the scene. Other pieces include a rain-swept patio complete with a three-dimensional umbrella, and a terra-cotta colored picture of a tiled sink framed in nickel silver, with tacks representing the Imodium tablets travelers in Mexico are so familiar with. The colors, the juxtaposition of three-dimensional objects echoing the two-dimensional objects in the drawings are all combined imaginatively to create the latest venue for the artist's keen eye and subtle sense of humor.

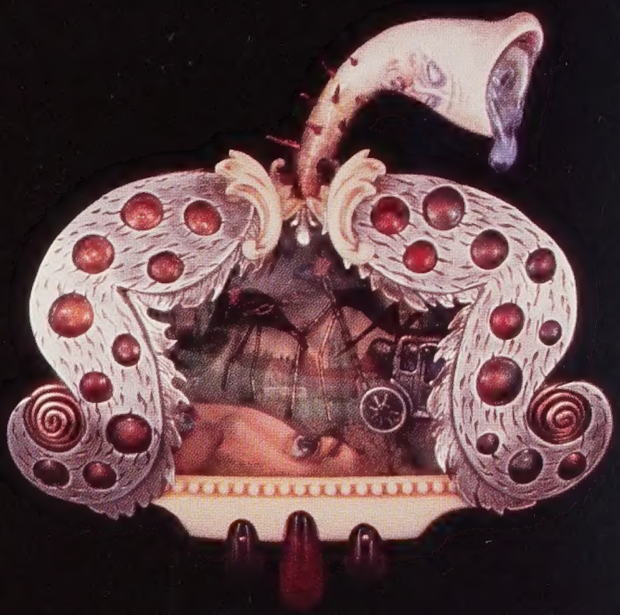
The evolution of Lynda Watson-Abbott's work from sculptural pins to miniature wearable sculptures to free-standing sculptural collages is continuing. By insisting on keeping her visions and statements on a personal level, she has filled her art with her own sense of self and the world as she sees and interprets it. Where this ongoing transformation is leading not even she knows for sure, but there is a large audience waiting for the next segment.

Dorothy Spencer, an arts consultant based in Philadelphia, is the author of Total Design *(Chronicle Books, 1991).*



While Walking – Santa Fe brooch
sterling silver, copper
2⅛ x 2⅝ x ¼", 1990

Como? "Flecha Amarillo"
drawing with frame
Prismacolor pencils, wood,
stain, brass, tacks
16½ x 15¾ x 1¼", 1991



Monumentality in miniature

The Narrative Jewelry of Robin Kranitsky and Kim Overstreet

by Gail M. Brown

Much American jewelry in the 1980s mirrored the decade's excess: an abundance of found object forms flooded the galleries. This profusion was echoed in many of the individual pieces; quantities of disparate elements were recycled in the pursuit of a new jewelry for the ecologically aware. While the appeal of this jewelry's seeming randomness paled quickly, the potential for narrative jewelry expanded when the rich choice of palette was coupled with ideas. The reemergence of content with ornamentation has a strong American appeal, a literalness that aligns itself with the metalsmith's recurring interest in representational imagery.

Adapting these concepts to a wearable scale presents special challenges to the makers. In the mid-1980s, Robin Kranitsky and Kim Overstreet began to create wearable dioramas inspired initially by found objects. They embellished them with fabricated components to enhance the tableaux. Calling themselves "Lost and Found," they formed one-of-a-kind spatial narratives. The complexity of the imagery and the limitations of body scale dictated the creation of a world in miniature. We are invited to peer into a lilliputian universe of the makers' combined imaginations.

Kranitsky and Overstreet share a fascination with fairy tales and science fiction, surrealism and Victoriana, Frieda Kahlo and Joseph Cornell, animation and dramatic theater. Their vocabulary of recurring images is as varied as the range of moods and issues their stories encompass. They create allegories to embody emotions, conflicts and dreams, setting their stage with human and inanimate objects in architectural settings enriched by dramatic references to nature.

Kranitsky and Overstreet have a unique collaborative relationship in which they work through ideas, division of labor and choices of technique and materials with an aesthetic harmony. As their tales have become more complex, their needs have required them to fabricate more of the components, reforming found objects in order to preserve the mellowed nature of a recycled palette. Their materials include silver, copper, brass, polymers, nickel, lead foil, paper, Plexiglas, Micarta, balsa, glass, bone, clay, stones, cotton, Corian, acetate, epoxies, wire, wood putty, scratchboard, Fimo and Sculpy, hair, metal dust, sand, watch faces, postcard fragments, rhinestones, crystal, bamboo, spoons, currency, artificial turf and beads. They carve, mold, inlay, assemble and fabricate with a virtuosity of skill and technique. They prepare patterns and layouts of inside and outside collages, fashion the components, alter found objects to better juxtapose them with fabricated elements, integrate the frames, enclose the acetate "window" and mount the structure on balsa conforming to the free shape. The backdrop collage is articulated to make the objects appear to float in minute space. Then the environment is sealed with great care, achieving a rareness of combined effort harking back to a medieval workshop.

The collaboration began with objects special to the artists and remembrances of nursery rhymes. In *Dandling*, inspired by an antique postcard and charm, the mood is playful. We share a common childhood: a moment in life is frozen, a time of security. The point of view is child centered; a perception of oneself is reflected in the over scale and the delight in the performing pet. The shade blowing in the breeze beckons us to experience the memory of a time when a village could represent one's whole cosseting world. The design is highly articulated to invite us through the large window of recollection. We are enticed to look into many "windows" in the artists' work. They explore the shaped canvas as picture frame within another, larger picture whose forms take on an unlimited variation of contour. Design is carefully manipulated to emphasize complexity within what is actually a tiny area. Visual depth is created by layering and forced perspective. These illusions create a monumentality within a miniature domain. Every aspect is so completely worked through, with not one association left to chance, that we are left with ever more mystery.

Clockwise
from upper left

Dandling
Micarta, silver, Plexiglas, copper,
found objects
2⅞ x 2½ x ¾", 1990

Anybody's Journey
silver, Micarta, Plexiglas, copper,
polymer clay,
glass beads, found objects
2¾ x 2¾ x ¾", 1990

The Story Told
brass, silver, copper,
Plexiglas, polymers, metal dust,
paper, found objects
4¼ x 2 x ¾", 1990

Friend or Foe
copper, Micarta, silver, polymer,
found objects
3 x 2½ x ¾", 1990

Anybody's Journey is a stage set with stylized baroque tears and heavy emotion, using an antique ivory razor handle and glass beads set in silver. The lily bows in grief; the drapes part to present a fragment of a commanding melodrama: a carriage pulled by black crows is about to overwhelm a fearful female. The anticipated chaos is juxtaposed with the formal elegance of the design. Through fairy-tale imagery, much of their work addresses pending crises, surviving relationships and overcoming obstacles.

Themes of women's issues recur, both times of frailty and those of strength. The use of child-like story images to convey these weighty messages has a curious power. The competence and value of the female are addressed in *The Story Told*, which was inspired by an excerpt from the novel *Eva Luna*. The vanquished figure is without a past. His posture and worn, heavily patinated armor with torn messages in metal stuffed haphazardly through the chinks emphasize his defeat. His hollow head allows no memory, no hope. Will the madonna-like woman share her strength and her history with him? Will she instill hope, the budding flower, for a new life? Her understanding of the past offers power and optimism for the future.

The fantasy is intensified when objects become animated, as in *Friend or Foe*. The gutted candle views the errant flame struggling to survive. He is either watching his past or hoping for the survival of another. The flame is trying to get back to the candle. We are awed by the power of nature: relentless wind and bleak landscape, aggressive roots and branches and lush, voluptuous cut fruit contrast with the restrained patterns of the furnishings. The stories invite individual reaction and engage viewers to pursue their own conclusions. There are always elements which leave us fascinated.

Some pieces become dark and surreal, dealing with isolation and fear. In *Monocular* the female figure is seeking sanity in a world of confusion. The overbearing watchful eye allows no peace. The undulating snake prevents her from reaching the key to escape. The tension is enhanced by the stylized art nouveau design which overwhelms the diminutive female. The carved Micarta and varied metals create a beautiful, jewel-like world in which the environment is embellished from a wall painting to a brick floor. But dangerous implications are to be understood on intimate examination.

Intrepid takes the familiar form of a circle pin to a new dimension. We are led through levels of the unexpected, slightly open doors with glimpses and hints of yet another direction in which to go. A richly embellished place setting poses undulating utensils as a threatening force. Within, a merman attempts to defend his space. We set up our defenses but cower inside. There is everything personal and individual about this, and also universal. With each scenario Kranitsky and Overstreet delight in dressing the set for a full visual experience: the play of cool silver juxtaposed with warm copper and wood, the visual power of gesturing tendrils and utensils extending beyond the circle and the intricate etched silver patterning. They invite us to succumb and lose ourselves in these tactile embellishments.

Hunger celebrates the surreal with a tattered, mummylike figure covered in delicate calligraphed messages. The script talks about success. This work was influenced by Dalí and his dream image book. Inside the belly of the prosperity box is a figure that is energized by eating very ripe cherries (as in "Life is just a bowl of ..."). The arms on both figures have simply become spoons, whose gestures echo one another and lead the viewer's eye around the piece. The gaping mouth, individual teeth and absence of eyes remind us of what is all-consuming. We think of excess and satiation and unfulfilled appetites. By illuminating our inner desires and fears, we may find them to be universal.

Kranitsky and Overstreet have taken found object jewelry to a new level. They make us aware of the potential of jewelry to be theater. We step through the frame and enter another reality, which is at the same time both exotic and familiar. They ask us to consider that the miniature may encompass psychological reality as well as fantasy. The nature and content of their work are about the same concerns: power and fragility, monumentality and preciousness. They have created a new context for our perception of these ideas. Values become intensified and enriched when viewed in this scale, a scale which makes one peer so intently to absorb the details that contemplation of ideas inevitably follows.

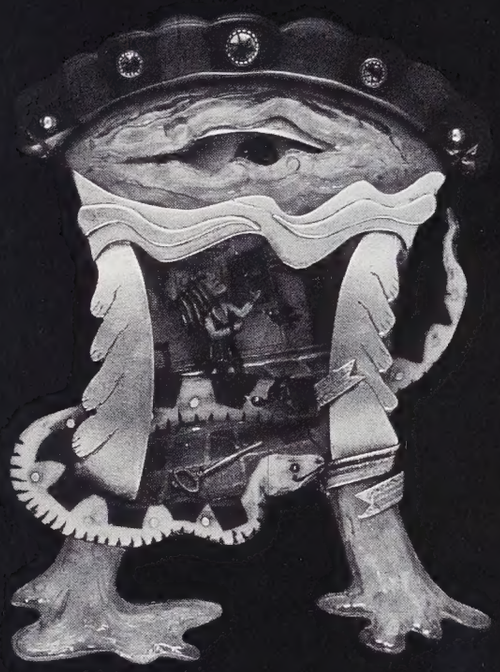
Gail M. Brown lives in Philadelphia and writes on jewelry and fine craft.

Clockwise from upper left

Monocular
silver, Plexiglas, Micarta,
copper, brass, found objects
3 x 2¼ x ¾", 1990

Intrepid
silver, brass, copper, Micarta,
bone, paper, found objects
3 x 3⅛ x ¾", 1991

Hunger
balsa, nickel silver, Plexiglas, copper,
brass, lead foil, paper, found objects
3½ x 2 x ¾", 1991



Material Evidence

MARK STANITZ

BY WILLIAM BARAN-MICKLE

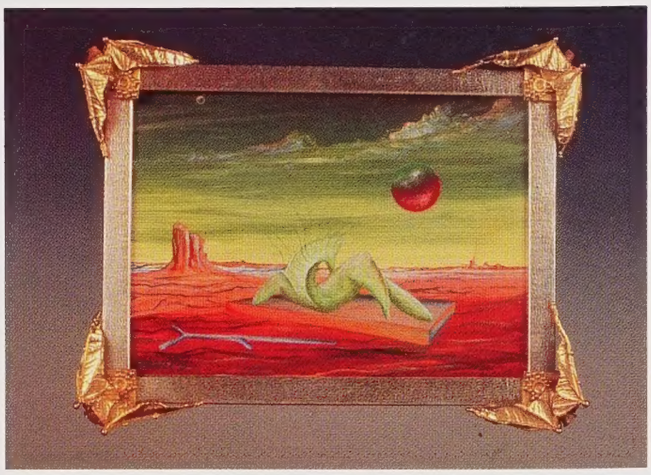
The life and work of Mark Stanitz are a study in balances and contrasts. His physical life is lived in a structured, thoughtful and mannered way. His inner world is worked out through his artwork with an unquestioned faith. With the exception of a nine-year stint as a goldsmith living on commission work in North Carolina, Stanitz has not required his work to perform commercial duties. Rather, he is moved to create for reasons to be discussed.[1]

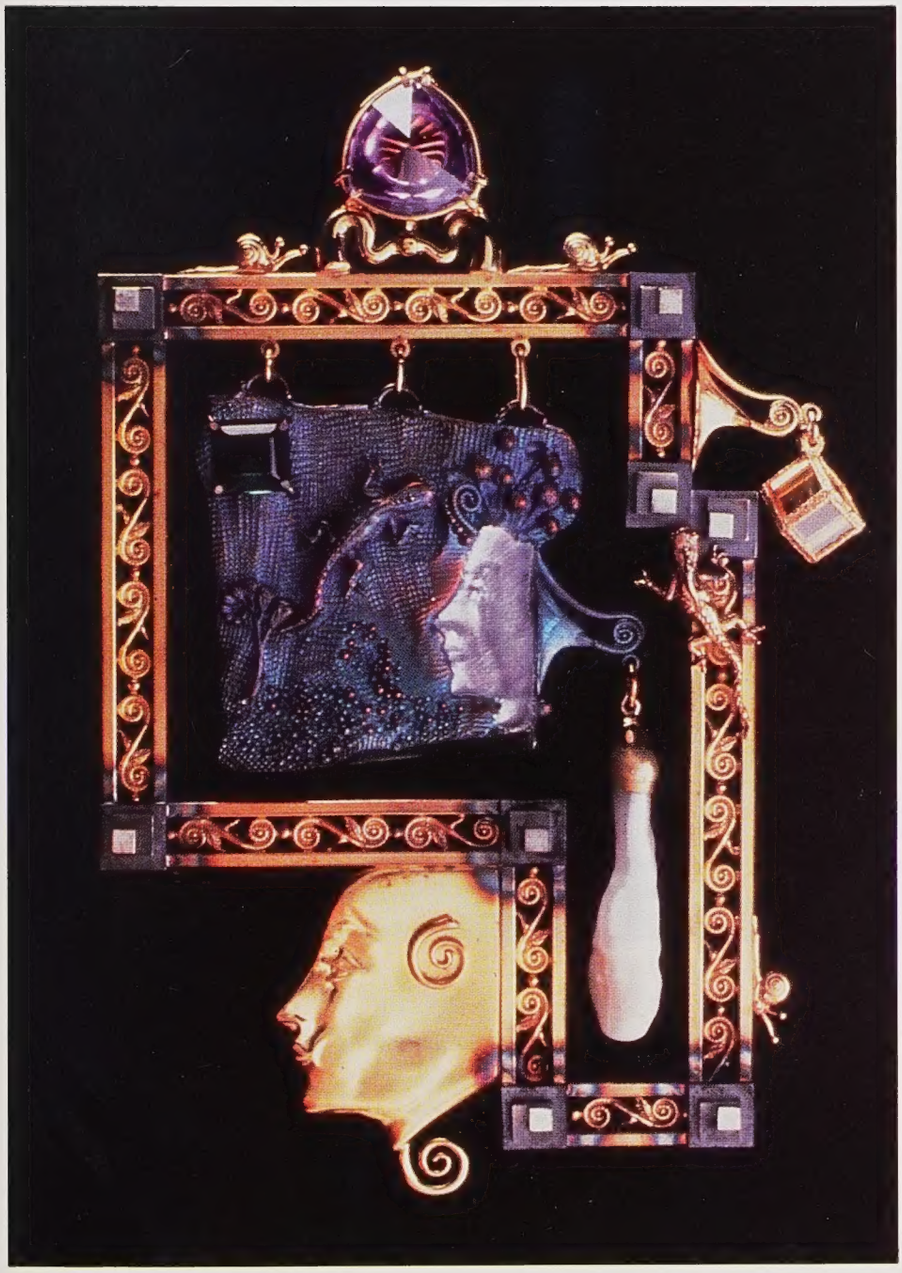
By his own admission, Stanitz was not the typical child who passionately played sports or roamed around with a gang of friends. Rather, he was fascinated by the interesting details of his insect collections and the intricacy of gears and circuit boards. However, he focused not so much on the physics as on the invention. His love of detail and creativity provided a balance to an otherwise structured childhood.

Before starting out as a painting major at Kent State University, Mark Stanitz grew up near the Salvador Dalí Museum in Cleveland, Ohio. His early paintings were very much in the surrealist style. The construction of designed space and the collection of disparate elements have always been present in his personal jewelry. Stanitz's works are intensely detailed; this practice is simply and solidly a part of him. These recurring details begin to relate together in the same way a dream is analyzed or the subconscious is probed. Literal surrealist paintings re-emerge overtly in his work in a series of small brooches with oil paint on steel in ornate sterling frames (see *Landscape with Nude*). Intrigued by this re-emergence, he has recently begun to paint on canvas again to see where "it" wants to go.

Stanitz's early work provokes wonderment about their narrative. These jewelry pieces were a confluence of influences – Lalique, Fabergé, Dalí and Renaissance and Flemish painting – an intriguing combination, to say the least. A closer look at these pieces leads one to a process of locating them in a historical and theoretical context (see *Square Wave*).

Beginning this exercise, one can see a Renaissance influence in the well-rendered reliefs of the facial profiles and the ornate architectural framing in Stanitz's work. Flemish influences can be found in the numerous little objects from snails and lizards to leaves that, in addition, are depicted in combinations unlikely to exist in a real-time continuum, creating a *vanitas* of sorts. In order to paint surrealist brooches, for instance, Stanitz used minuscule brushes in a way similar to that used by Jan van Eyck in his Flemish paintings. Overall shape and the larger, general appearance of most of Stanitz's brooches reflect Lalique's art nouveau style. The actual spatial organization of the "canvas" with dangling square gemstones, for instance, is distinctly surrealist in attitude, though perhaps there is a touch of Hieronymus Bosch at work here as well.

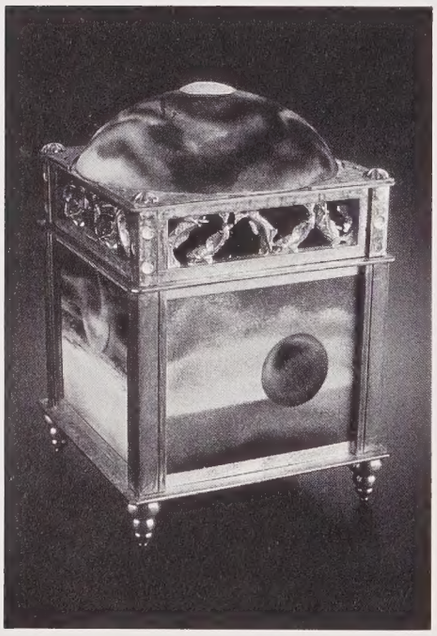




ABOVE
Landscape with Nude brooch
18K gold, sterling silver,
stainless steel, oil paint, 3½ x 2″, 1989

LEFT
Square Wave brooch
18K gold, sterling silver, enamel,
gemstones, 5 x 3¾″, 1989

A Box for Your Addictions II
sterling silver, 5½ x 3½ x 3½", 1991



A Day in a Life box
sterling silver, oil on stainless
5 x 3 x 3", 1990

Stanitz has accumulated a large number of separate images modeled in wax or Plasticine clay and cast in silicone rubber molds which he can reuse at any time. Among them are snails, fish, lizards, leaves, pods, grapes, spermatozoa, amoeba and faces of various kinds, all of which hold meaning for him. The intricate metalwork that combines these elements is reminiscent of the complexity seen in Richard Mawdsley's metalwork. When Stanitz combines his vocabulary, he feels as though he is putting together a poem or perhaps a poetic biography.

Stanitz pays great attention to surface texture, pattern and subtlety. Many of the individual elements and their arrangements are iconic and reflect symbolic images over the ages. Many of these have revolved around the concept of fertility, growth and death.

Beyond these details and influences, it is difficult to say what the work is about or what the maker intends. Stanitz himself can only guess, though his is a more educated guess. This is because, despite the broad range of vocabulary that is his personal language, the story comes from his subconscious, nudged along, of course, by his technical expertise. "I begin with a premise of what a piece will be and have a sense of scale. I begin working and it unfolds much like jazz, impromptu. There is never a question of where it will go next."

One aspect of Stanitz's recent work approaches self-portrait. Roughly two years ago he stopped making jewelry and began making small sculptural boxes. A number of elements from his jewelry appeared on these more sculptural objects, yet the subtexts were pushed to deeper, even urgent, dimensions. Stanitz sees the box as a metaphor for the body. Too small to contain a cigarette, these containers hold the idea of personal meaning, be it hope, courage, oasis or sanctuary. In fact, they could hold a keepsake, a personal relic or symbolic object. To Stanitz, these visually and symbolically heavy walls are the protective facades we use to endure life in public.

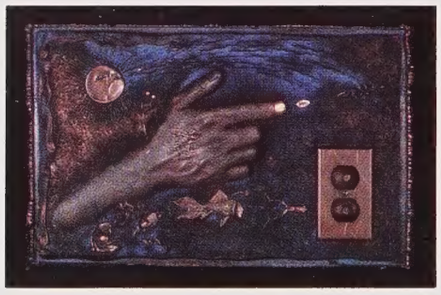
These facades are varied in treatment and subject but relate to the topic of the public and private person. The first box Stanitz produced confronted the problematic subject of skulls and skeletons. *Ark of the Covenant* has a lid rimmed in skulls. The top plate features an adult skeleton in a fetal position holding a baby skeleton. As difficult as many people find this imagery, it should not be mistaken for the nihilistic icons prevalent in heavy metal or other contemporary popular culture. It is seriously based in an older iconography of painting and its grappling with the seasons of life.

For Stanitz, the treatment of the skeletons on the top plate is akin to an anthropological discovery. These project sites Stanitz has learned to call "levels." Formerly he created a series of wall reliefs by this title, which he clearly recognizes as self-portraits. Stanitz believes his work is prophetic, a claim which can be supported in hindsight analysis of the specifics of his life. In the case of *A Box for Your Addictions*, the symbolism speaks painfully and directly to a personal tragedy revealed to him soon after completion. *A Day in a Life* box is also about cyclical changes, here, that of a day. Each panel is an oil painting on steel. The lid section features a dome painted like a globe. *Inclination: Plain* is visually dynamic and shares stylistic affiliation with more playful popular iconic imagery. A reoccurring theme in the boxes and much of the jewelry is the life cycle: fertility and growth and the issues of male-female relationships.

Ark of the Covenent box
sterling silver, 5 x 3¾ x 3¾", 1989
Photo by Martha Stanitz

Stanitz sees his father's influence in his work, exemplified in his structured, detailed and fairly unemotional approach to life. He can also see where his mother has added much to balance him through what he calls his "heart side," providing him with "an emotional, personal and fluid center." He embraces this female and male energy in order to create. His need for balance and expression leads him to integrate both sides of his being in his work.

Stanitz recognizes that men and women share traits and that there exists a positive potential for better mutual understanding between the sexes. But he believes that each must locate, understand as much as possible and celebrate what makes each unique. This process had led him to focus on his own maleness in recent works in progress. This does not occur without trials by fire. Indeed, fire is a favorite analogy Stanitz uses to explain his life and art. "The object to me is not the point. Take a fire. The flame and burning, the way you lay it out, the aesthetic are what's important. The ash that's left over is of no consequence whatsoever." His art works are "the evidence of a reality that existed at a point in time that is now forever gone....These are the ashes that are left over."



Level I wall relief
copper elecroform, stones
22 x 10 x 1½", 1986

The object is what is left, like the ashes, after the process. They are the material evidence of his exploration, a snapshot of an experience. For Stanitz, the process is an emotionally free experience he uses to tap into his subconscious, as the Beat poets of the 1960s used free association and stream of consciousness. Stanitz does not draw his work before engaging his materials. Certain familiar parameters are operative, but he does not need to know where he is going. One indication that this process seems to work for him is that, given the sheer number of precast forms he works with, as well as the volume of art historical influences in his work, his objects do not look forced or contrived. Unquestionable technical facility and a large personal language of forms allow Stanitz to merely create.

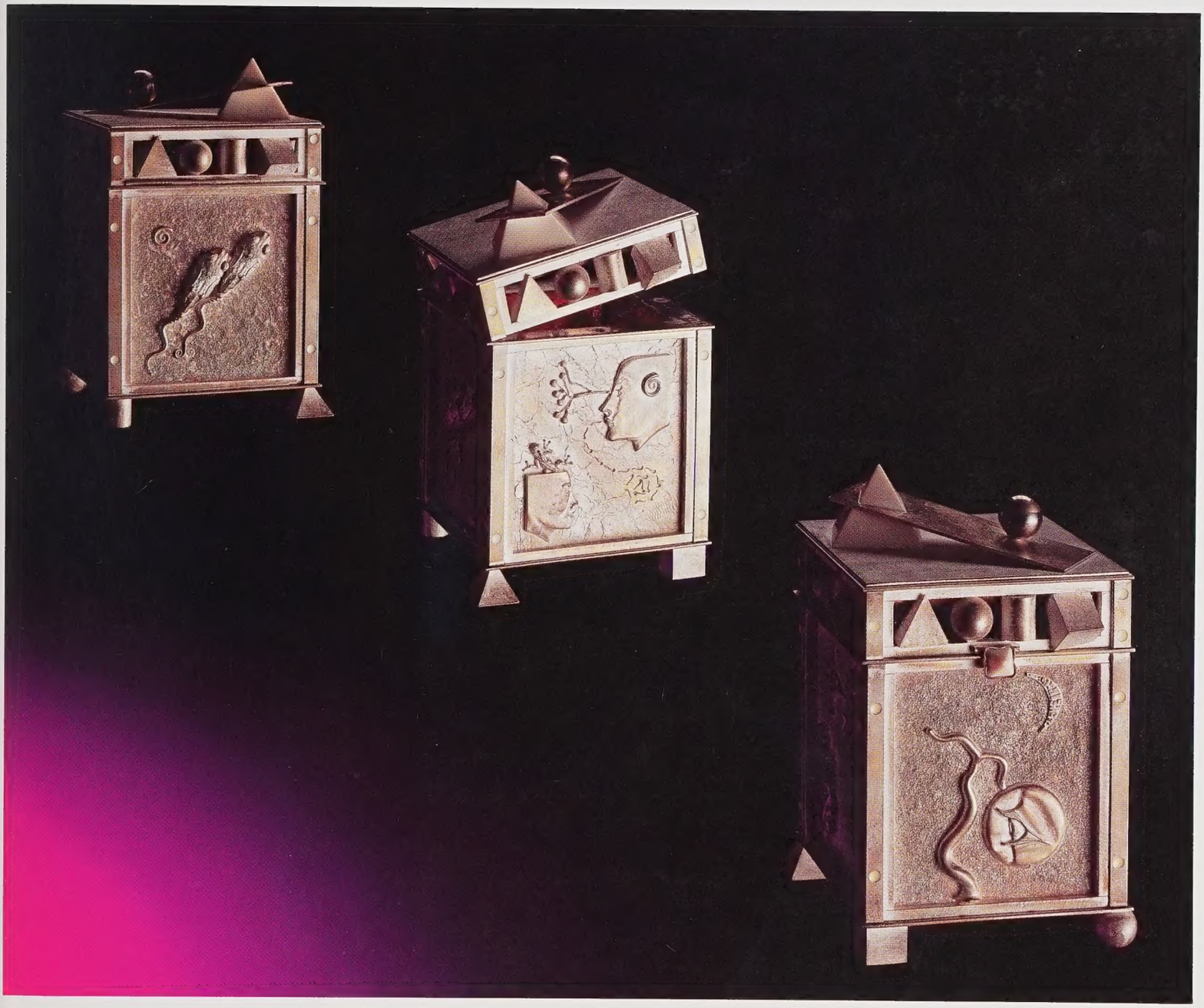
In his series *Level I, Level II*, etc., he demanded of himself a more formal or overt participation. As a self-portrait, the central image is taken from his own arm. A familiar ecosystem of parts accompanies the dramatically pointing finger. The charged atmosphere is made literal by the inclusion of an electric outlet. The effect is that of a magnetic field where surrounding spermatozoa, dangling square stones, and snails are scattered in confusion. These reliefs demonstrate a more forceful, directed and conscious art style.

RIGHT
Three views of *Inclination: Plain*
sterling silver, 5½ x 3½ x 3½", 1990
Photo by Martha Stanitz

As a matter of coincidence, the process by which these reliefs were made includes electroforming. Molds of his arm and various other details were arranged on a surface and painted to attract copper. The largest relief to date was in the electroplating bath for 21 days. Specific areas were gold leafed, fumed for coloration and then other objects added to the form. This series engages in yet another art practice, one similar to the conceptual realist George Segal. In Stanitz's approach the addition of actual self-impressions allows for a more direct presence of authority and the opportunity for a more consciously probing and revealing tableau of self-expressiveness. The way in which Stanitz's work helps him understand himself and how he relates to a world of men, women and children, life and death, is evident in recent works which have brought him to focus on his own maleness and its relationship to his emotional well-being. As he continues to evolve, so does his work.

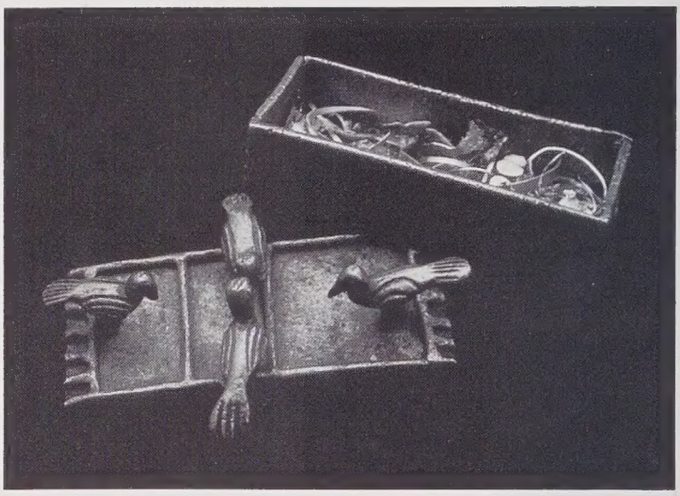
William Baran-Mickle is a metalsmith and writer living near Rochester, NY.

[1] Mark Stanitz has been a professional in the field since 1973 and has taught nearly half of that time. He has been a professor of metalsmithing at the School for American Craftsmen, Rochester Institute of Technology, since 1984.



Ashante Casting

Comes to the United States



by Paulette J. Werger

In 1965, while visiting near Kumasi in Ghana, Max Fröhlich first saw the process of Ashante casting. At the time he was serving as "external assessor of exams" at the university in Kumasi. He had a few days free after completing his duties before his flight back to Zurich, and discovered that there were craft villages nearby. These were organized by the type of craft they produced: weaving, pottery and casting. At the casting village, in a courtyard of pounded earth, he saw smiths making beeswax models, covering them with clay, and firing them in a handmade furnace. Although an established metalsmith and teacher, Max was thrilled by the results. "It was absolutely new to me," he would say later. "I saw something I could never do in Europe – fine thin castings, beautiful castings with the most simple things in the most simple way."

History

Ashante casting (also spelled Ashanti and Asante) is a lost-wax gravity technique which is similar to the foundry-style casting of today. The distinguishing aspect of the Ashante process is that it is "closed-circuit." Most lost-wax gravity casting is done by pouring hot metal into a clay mold. In the Ashante process, however, the metal crucible and flask are one unit. This entire unit is fired up to the flow point of the metal within and then inverted to allow the molten metal to pour into the wax cavity. There is no direct pouring of metal into an open flask; neither is centrifugal force used.

This method is particular to the people of the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Nigeria, Benin, and Cameroon. Sub-Saharan Africa has an environment rich in natural resources for making models and the outer clay coating. Hardwoods serve as fuel for firing. Naturally occurring gold deposits have been used not only to fashion objects but to attract trade as well. Although lost-wax gravity casting with bronze was in use around AD 1000, there is no hard evidence to indicate when closed-circuit casting began. It is also unclear whether closed-circuit casting arose from within this region or was introduced from outside. A century prior to European contact, West Africa had established trade routes reaching as far east as India, where the technique may have originated.

European trade did not begin until the latter half of the 15th century, when the Portuguese reached the shores of Ghana. In 1502 trade records indicate that the Akan people produced 2,000 ounces of gold manillas and jewelry which was shipped back to Europe and melted into bullion. The English and Dutch also established trade and much early Akan goldwork was destroyed. This pattern of destruction makes it nearly impossible to pinpoint the earliest forms of gold casting.

As trade with the Europeans increased, so did local mining. By controlling trade and the gold fields, the Ashante became the most powerful state of the Akan peoples, with the Ashante king amassing great wealth for the state. Gold dust was used as currency, and goldsmiths became a privileged class. The goldsmiths were responsible for the casting of jewelry and royal regalia. They also produced the cast brass weights and boxes by which gold dust was measured and stored. During the 18th and 19th centuries, production of gold and brass castings reached its peak.

The castings fall roughly into three categories: castings from nature, geometric images and representational imagery. Natural cast forms, for which objects from nature are cast directly, include shells, beetles, plant pods and seeds. Geometric images include flat discs up to 4 inches across, rectangles, tubes, hollow spherical beads and more complicated forms. Representational imagery includes human figures, animals and tools, serving to illustrate proverbs and scenes from daily Akan life. Proverbs were in common use, both as a distillation of traditional wisdom and as a means by which the chiefs, priests, elders and spokesmen mediated between the king and his people. The use of such imagery has a dual purpose, combining utilitarian function with a method of conveying verbal concepts.

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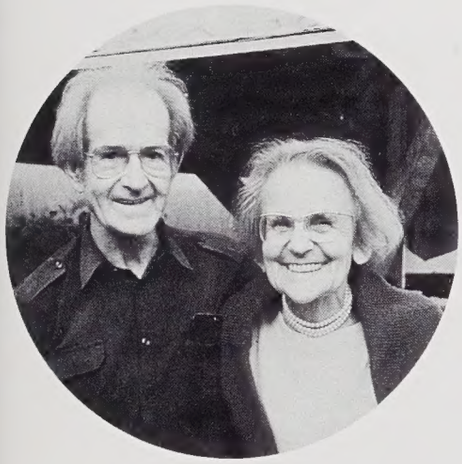
Ashante gold dust box
brass, contemporary, 3 x 1 x ½"

The castings are beautifully complex with rich detail. Smaller castings are generally solid, and ones larger in scale are hollow to conserve metal. These hollow castings can be extremely thin and free of porosity. The surfaces achieved are the result of highly skilled and proficient wax working. Wax threads as thin as 26 gauge are rolled from beeswax using a wooden paddle, inverted board, palm oil and warm water. The wax threads are then tightly coiled or wrapped around clay forms to fashion beads, portrait masks and animals. Solid castings are often made by cutting or pinching wax into shape, and then further tooling this shape with a hot needle. Wax details are fused on as embellishment. This methodology, although historical in nature, is still being practiced in West Africa today. Brass castings of weights, boxes and tourist items are commonly found in marketplaces in Ghana and Cameroon. Gold castings are usually reserved for commissions to the Ashante state.

What Max Fröhlich observed in Ghana in 1965 were contemporary expressions of Ashante casting using centuries-old forms and techniques. At the time Fröhlich was already a major figure in European goldsmithing. He was head teacher in the metalsmithing department of the School of Applied Arts in Zurich, and had been awarded the Golden Ring of Honor by the Society of Goldsmiths. In spite of his European commitments, he was able to pursue his interest in Ashante casting during his returns to Kumasi to serve as external assessor. He continued to visit the casting complexes and learn from the local goldsmiths. Initially, he simply watched, but eventually he was invited to participate directly in the casting. In order to inspire other goldsmiths and to point out the technical virtuosity of Ashante casting, he published a paper on the process in 1975.



Max and Ruth Fröhlich
Haystack, 1991

In 1977, Fröhlich returned to West Africa, this time to the grasslands of Cameroon. While there he was asked to help with technical problems of porosity in brass castings. He was able to share information he had gathered from the goldsmiths of Ghana with their counterparts in Cameroon. This led to a more detailed analysis of wax work, investment using local clays, furnace making and firing.

His analysis of West African casting allowed Fröhlich to establish a European equivalent of this technique and continue his commitment to sharing information. He and his wife, Ruth, conducted workshops in Ashante casting in various schools in Switzerland, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and England. "I thought it could be interesting for goldsmiths and sculptors to cast in this way," he said. "Perhaps it could be a way of working for us."

Ashante casting made its way to the United States in 1986, when Max and Ruth Fröhlich hosted their first workshop at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts. The three-week workshop allowed students to have hands-on experience with every aspect of the technique. The Fröhlichs then gave lectures and demonstrations at the Tyler School of Art and the Cleveland Art Institute. In 1991 they returned to Haystack, where they worked tirelessly with a class of professional metalsmiths and advanced students for two weeks. Haystack provided an environment with the intense sense of community found in a casting village. In the shanty that housed the two handmade kilns, Max Fröhlich would squat at eye level to the kiln in use, as he had done in Africa, to read the subtleties of the fire. Ruth Fröhlich would carefully mix investment clays and knead them to the correct consistency. Teaching was by example rather than words, and very few motions were wasted. Almost 90 castings were made, from small intricate beads to large hollow vessels and wall pieces.

^

Paulette J. Werger, *Looking for Clues*
Ashante technique
with fused sterling and fossil
2¼ x 1 x ¼", 1992

>

Paulette J. Werger, *Waiting for Rain*
Ashante technique
with fabricated gold and silver, opal,
Paraíba tourmaline
3 x 2 x ¼", 1992

Photos by Jim Wildeman

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The Society of North American Goldsmiths

The Society of North American Goldsmiths (SNAG) was formed in 1970 to promote contemporary metalwork and jewelry. Through its publications, services and advocacy, SNAG serves the fine art and jewelry communities. SNAG's publications and conferences provide technical information and critical insight to practitioners and teachers of metalwork. Professional metalsmiths, students, collectors, gallery owners and enthusiasts make up the dynamic mix of the Society.

Services

The Society's annual conference provides a forum for the exchange of many points of view. Speakers of national recognition offer stimulating discourse on a range of topics. Members of the Society attend the conference at reduced rates.

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Metalsmith is the only magazine in America devoted solely to the metal arts. Please see the reverse side of this page for a detailed description of this exciting magazine. Membership in the Society includes a subscription to *Metalsmith.*

The *SNAG Newsletter* is published bimonthly and is available to members only. It features timely information on exhibitions, work-shops, conferences and job opportunities throughout North America.

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The Society offers several types of memberships, each tailored to a specific level of involvement in the field of contemporary metalsmithing.

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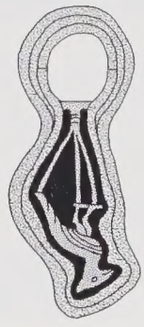


6

Process Overview

Flask Preparation and Firing

Wax model with sprues. 1

Wax model is covered with charcoal clay coat. 2

Outer clay coat is added and bowl of crucible formed. 3

Wax model is melted out, metal pieces added, and the flask completely closed to form a bulb. 4

Final coat of outer clay is added over entire flask; flask is fired to melt metal within. 5

Flask with molten metal is pulled from furnace and inverted; molten metal flows into empty cavity, completing the casting. 6

Based on illustrations by Max Fröhlich

Ashante casting, as adapted by Max Fröhlich, requires a series of detailed steps. Some of these can be dangerous unless proper safety precautions are used. In particular, one should be aware that brass casting produces toxic zinc fumes, necessitating the use of a respirator and outdoor firing. *The following description is not meant as a teaching guide but only as an introduction to the process.*

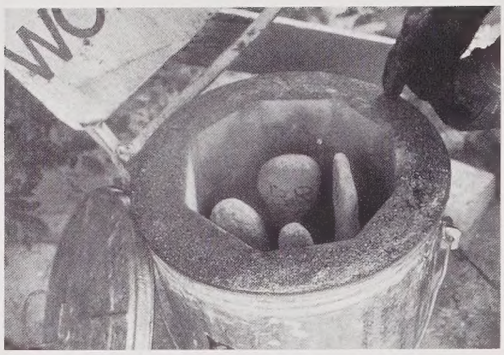
Perhaps the most important part of the Ashante technique is making the wax model, for it is here that one begins to exploit creative possibilities. Raw beeswax is traditionally preferred because of its ability to be worked into thin sheets or wires. Commercial waxes, although more brittle, may also be used. The wax can be worked simply with the aid of an alcohol lamp, spatula and needle tool. Parts can be welded together with the heated tip of the needle tool. When the model is finished, wax sprues must be added to form a vent for the release of gas and a passage for the metal to enter the mold. The wax model, once weighted, is ready for investment.

There are two clay bodies used in the investment process. (1) The Fröhlich charcoal clay, used as a face coat around the wax model, contains 1 part fine grog and 1 part charcoal powder by volume, to which is added 10% bentonite by weight. These are thoroughly mixed with water and several tablespoons of alcohol to a creamy consistency. This must sleep for 24 hours before use. (2) The Fröhlich clay, used as the outer jacket and crucible, contains 3 parts coarse unwashed grog to 1 part fine grog by weight, to which is added 10% bentonite by weight. Chopped grass or organic materials are also added. These are mixed with spring water until the clay is the consistency of pastry dough. This must also sleep for 24 hours before use.

To begin investing, the wax model is painted with alcohol to encourage the charcoal clay to stick. While still wet, a 1-mm-thick coat of charcoal is dabbed over the entire surface. Second and third coats, each 2 mm thick, are then applied, with drying time allowed between each coat. The charcoal coat preserves detail and carbonizes the atmosphere around the wax model, preventing porosity.

Coating the wax model with the outer clay involves several stages. First, over the charcoal clay, a thin layer of outer clay is applied by kneading the clay into walnut-size lumps and pressing these onto the moistened form. This layer is about 5 mm thick and is allowed to dry until warm to the touch. Second, the sprue area is built up to form the bowl of the crucible and allowed to dry. At this stage the wax is melted out over a charcoal fire. Finally the sprue hole is covered with a wax pad, and metal pieces added to the bowl and covered with newspaper. The bowl is then closed in completely with clay, forming a bulb-shaped crucible. The crucible can be reinforced with one or two extra layers of clay. The entire flask should be dry before firing. The West African equivalent of this clay body is high in silica and feldspar. Mixed with cow dung, the porous clay has less than 1% shrinkage and resists cracking.

Invested waxes ready to be closed in and eventually fired



Packing the kiln with flasks for casting

Opened flask with cast metal inside

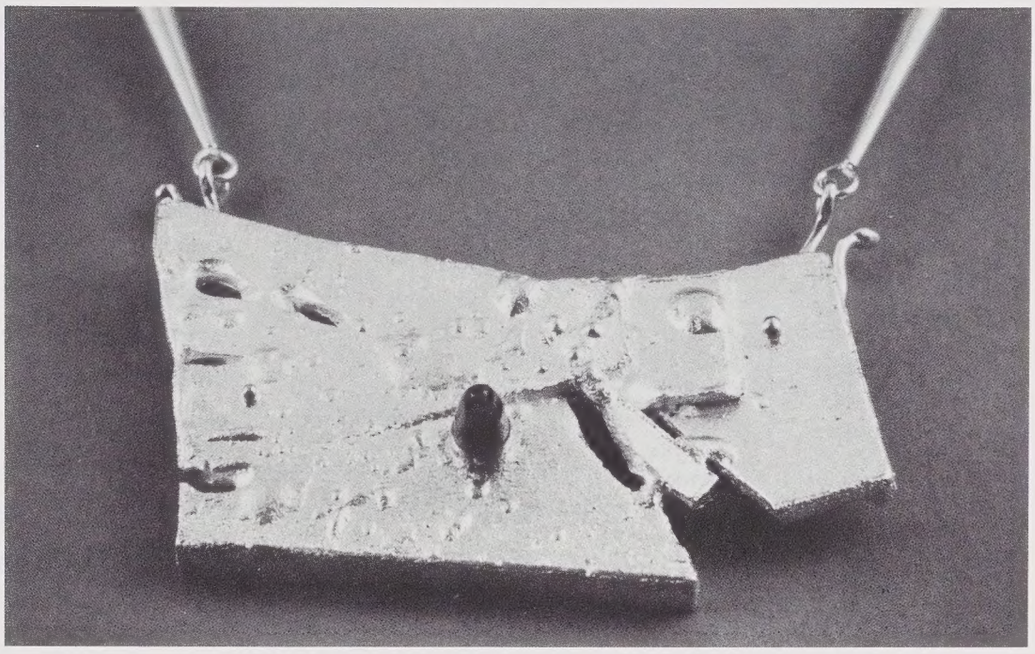
A 15-gallon garbage can of galvanized steel serves as the outer wall of the Fröhlich furnace. At the base of the garbage can is a vent hole 3 inches in diameter. The garbage can is lined with a fiber-fax insulating blanket and refractory brick, which is mortared into place. At the bottom of the kiln is an air chamber, above which is a perforated plate of cast refractory cement, forming a false bottom. When air is forced into the chamber at the base of the kiln, an upward draft occurs. The charcoal fuel is burned from the base of the kiln upward, and heavily insulated side walls help maintain temperatures which can reach 2200°F (1200°C). The West African kilns are often made from old cooking pots lined with refractory cement or from stacked handmade bricks.

Firing is perhaps the most enjoyable part of Ashante casting. The entire process depends upon one's ability to "read the fire." Subtle changes in the color of the flame, coals and smoke are indicators of temperature changes within the kiln. The fuel must be a hardwood charcoal such as oak, maple or mesquite. Hardwood charcoals yield a slow-burning fire, producing an oxygen-depleted environment within the kiln. Firing can take from 20 minutes to 2 hours, depending upon the size of the pieces to be cast. To begin firing, the kiln is partially filled with charcoal and the flasks are placed crucible side down. After preheating for 15 minutes, small pieces of charcoal are tightly packed around the flasks, filling the kiln. The heat in the kiln is gradually brought up until a yellow-orange flame appears, the result of wax residue in the flasks burning off. An air source, either foot bellows or hair dryer, may be used until the coals at the top of the kiln are glowing. Periodically, the charcoal is tamped down and new charcoal added to the top of the kiln.

When the brass begins to melt, greenish-yellow flames are produced and a whitish-yellow condensation forms on top of the coals. Both of these indicate that toxic zinc fumes are being released. After the yellow-green flames subside, a white zinc smoke is produced, indicating that the flasks are ready to cast. The flasks are pulled from the kiln, drilled to release gas, and inverted to allow the molten metal to flow into the wax casting. The hot flasks are set aside for about 5 minutes until the metal solidifies. They are then quenched in water and cracked open to reveal the finished castings.

Betsy Douglas
Rock Explosion pendant (detail)
Ashante cast sterling silver,
14K yellow gold, indicolited tourmaline,
fine silver chain, 1¾ x 2½ x ⅜"
chain and tips:17", 1992

Photo by Bill Douglas



Viability for the Metalsmith

For metalsmiths, Ashante casting provides many benefits. The establishment of a small foundry is inexpensive, costing less than $200, and easily managed by one person. Castings from the intimate scale of beads to larger hollow forms are all possible using the same setup. The castings can be extremely thin, with high-resolution detail in which something as subtle as a thumbprint can show in the finished piece. The surfaces of the castings require little finishing, and a variety of metals, such as brass, bronze, silver, gold and shibuichi alloys, can all be cast with predictable results.

Ashante casting is a methodical and time-consuming process. It requires both patience and a willingness to learn from one's mistakes. These aspects may be viewed negatively in today's microwave society. However, the rhythm of preparation actually allows plenty of time for benchwork – waxes can be set aside, clay bodies need to dry. A true pleasure is that one works everything by hand, in direct elemental fashion, establishing an honest relationship with the material where cause and effect are clearly related.

Using this traditional technique, the goldsmiths of Ghana and Cameroon continue to create objects of distinctive cultural identity. In 1986, Ashante casting was introduced to the United States by Max and Ruth Fröhlich. They hope that this vital process, rather than re-creating West African forms, will be integrated into our artistic identity.

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Paulette J. Werger is a metalsmith and educator living in Madison, Wisconsin. She had the pleasure of working with Max and Ruth Fröhlich in 1986 and 1991 at Haystack School of Crafts. She has lectured on Ashante casting at the Yuma Symposium (1991) and offered workshops at Montana State University and Bonny Doon School.

Photographing Small Art Objects

An Interview with Sheldan Collins

by Virginia Croft

As a former staff photographer for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Sheldan Collins has photographed an extraordinary range of art objects from one of the world's most extensive art collections. In his new book, *How to Photograph Works of Art* (Amphoto/Watson-Guptill Publications, 1992), he shares his experience and expertise in photographing both flat and three-dimensional subjects using 35mm, medium-format and large-format cameras. Although intended for professional photographers, the book is written in a style that is accessible to anyone with moderate experience at photography. In a recent interview, Mr. Collins offered some excellent advice for the metal artist who is photographing his or her own work.

VC: We can assume that most of our readers own a 35mm SLR camera, but for those who don't or are ready to buy a new one, what is your advice, especially in regard to the automatic cameras available today? I noticed in your book that you recommend one with a manual override.

SC: The automatic cameras are designed to work with average subjects, whatever that means. So, when confronted with a more unusual subject like a piece of bright metal against a dark background, the meter may be fooled and give you an underexposure or overexposure.

VC: As will any light meter.

SC: Yes, but you should be able to override it. You must judge whether the meter is indicating a reasonably good exposure or not because of the reflectance of the subject matter. The meters in 35mm cameras are reflective meters – that is, they read the light reflected from the subject. And that's really what you're photographing – reflected light. There are also incident meters, which are hand-held meters placed near the subject to measure the light falling on it. They're useful too, but we'll stick to reflective meters because they're the predominant type.

VC: How is the meter fooled?

SC: The meter's dumb. It averages values – light, dark, whatever – it interprets the light reflected from the subject as a gray. What the meter is doing is taking in a scene, whatever is in the field of view, and stirring all the tonalities into a soup – the lights, darks and medium tones. The values that come out of that soup from most subjects will be an 18% reflectance. There's a zone system of exposure that Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, Minor White and people like that developed. It's a great system, a little complicated to learn, but if people familiarize themselves with it, it can be an enormous benefit in their work. It helps you to start seeing scenes or setups as zones of gray values ranging from pure black, which is zone 0, to pure white, or zone 10. Zone 5, the middle, is this 18% reflectance. You'd think it would be 50% reflectance, but it's not, and that's the key to something important. The meter will record the tonalities so that they reflect less light than you might expect.

VC: So how do you compensate for the meter's averaging when shooting an "unaverage" setup?

SC: What you do with a reflective meter in a camera is look at the scene and ask yourself a question. This metal – suppose it's silver or gold, something very shiny – conceptually it's white. But if it's shiny, it's going to reflect whatever is around. If there's black around, it's going to reflect black. So you have to use reflectors or light to fill the shiny surface with light. Then you ask yourself how will the meter gauge this. It doesn't know it's supposed to be a predominantly light scene. It's going to interpret it as gray.

This is the heart of the matter really. If you have a light object on a light background, the meter looks at the scene and says it's pretty bright out here – stop down the lens or use a faster shutter so that less light reaches the film. Consequently it will record all those whitish bright tones as zone 5, or 18% reflectance gray. That's too gray.

VC: So the light meter says, essentially, this image is going to be overexposed, let's stop down, and you get something that's darker than you want.

SC: Yes. You override what the meter chooses and increase exposure a bit, but how much more is a bit more? You learn by experience, but usually you can safely give 50 to 100% more exposure than what the meter is saying. In terms of f-stops it's a 2 to 1 ratio. One stop brighter exposure doubles the amount of light reaching the film, so you can go ½ stop to a full stop or 50 to 100% more than what the meter says. I do a lot of 4 x 5 work now, and I follow what the meter says and then bracket anyway. Some people say this is what separates the pros from the amateurs. Pros bracket more to be sure they've got a good exposure. If you know what you're doing, you can make three exposures at ½-stop increments. For ordinary scenes that have light and dark, you can just do what the meter says, then give it ½ stop more and ½ stop less and you've probably got it. But for a very dark subject against a dark background, again the meter is fooled and you end up with a gray image, an overexposure. So you give the shot slightly less exposure. However, there are those instances where the scene is so dark that you *do* need more exposure to capture detail. That's the nuts and bolts of exposure and bracketing.

VC: Do you think an incident meter is a necessity for this kind of work?

SC: No, it isn't necessary, but it can be helpful. I learned a terrific trick from an old hand while working at the Metropolitan Museum. Practically every shot he took he checked with both a reflective meter and an incident meter. He would interpolate between the two, and 80% of the time got a pretty good exposure. Doing this is a good way to gain an understanding of exposure – what's going on – the difference between the reflective and incident readings. If they match, that's easy. But in extreme cases the difference can be two stops. That's quite a big range, so you go halfway between and bracket both ways.

VC: What is your advice on choosing and using lenses?

SC: A macro lens is really necessary for something that's closer than 18" to the camera. Although normal lenses can be made to focus closer than 18", the quality falls apart due to their physical limits. Macro lenses are excellent for life-size photography or tabletop work, photographing an object that appears 1/5 life size to life size in the camera. Sometimes they require using an extension ring between the lens and the camera body to push the lens proper farther out from the body. Without the ring, you may be at 1/2 life size, but with it you can go from 1/2 life size to life size.

VC: What length macro lens works best for tabletop setups?

SC: The big problem with the standard 50mm macro lens is that, if you're shooting life size, the front of the lens will be too close to the subject to allow comfortable lighting. It's going to be just a couple of inches from the subject – that is, double the focal length from the center of the lens, which in a 50mm is 2". So the front of the lens will be 4" from the subject, but if you're using a lens shade or the lens is recessed inside the lens barrel, which macro lenses tend to be, the lens is going to be 2" or 3" from the subject. How do you get light in there? Even at 1/2 life size the camera is very close with a 50mm macro. I think a better choice is 100mm. Macros come longer than that, but this is probably the most useful size.

VC: I would think that another reason for using a lens size that allows you to place the camera farther from the object would be minimizing the problem of reflections. Lighting is an important aspect of photographing metal objects successfully. Since the choice of lighting is closely related to the choice of film, we should begin with what films you recommend.

SC: Each film is designed for a particular color balance, which means it's made to match a light source that's either close to daylight or one of the standard tungsten sources. I would imagine most of your readers use either daylight coming through the window or electronic flash or tungsten studio lights. You can do pretty well with window light, especially north light, with some reflector cards, but you can't really control the color balance. The color balance of the film responds pretty readily to changes in the weather, whether it's cloudy or cloudless. And different types of color film interpret each of those slightly differently. I would avoid films that give high-saturation color, in the beginning at least, because they're not faithful to the work. Films like Ektachrome 100 Plus Professional (EPP) and Ekta EPX or EPZ are great for fashion and advertising photography for a saturated, gutsy look. I would think metalsmiths don't want that kind of look, that they want to record what appears to the average eye. For that purpose, stick to a film like Ektachrome EPN 100.

VC: What lighting source do you use with it?

SC: I use it with studio electronic flash, which is not to be confused with the electronic flash unit you attach to your camera. I would think that most of your readers would use tungsten film instead because tungsten lights are a lot cheaper than studio electronic flash. With tungsten lighting, you use what is called Type B film. You must block out any daylight because, in relation to Type B film, daylight is going to be quite blue. Ektachrome EPY 64 was redesigned recently; now it's called 64-T. It's very good and stable in terms of color fidelity down to 10 or 20 second exposures. The older stuff wasn't; once you got past 2 or 3 seconds you had to compensate for long exposures by adding yet more exposure – the old reciprocity problem. But this film has no problem until you get to 20 or 30 seconds.

VC: I can't imagine anyone needing a longer exposure than that. Why would you use a long exposure for a studio setup with plenty of lights?

SC: Even though the light might seem very bright, for any film in the 50 to 100 ISO range it's not that bright. You want good depth of field, and the way to get depth of field is to use a small aperture. A small aperture necessitates a long shutter speed, which requires a tripod. For any exposure of 1/30 second or longer you should use a cable release, even on a tripod.

VC: All right, let's say we've got an SLR with a 100mm macro lens, and we've set it up on a tripod and loaded it with Ektachrome EPY 64-T. How do we light the set?

SC: Photo floods work well, but don't use them directly – bounce them off a white card. You can buy big white cards and shiny silver cards at art supply stores and cut them up to use as small reflectors and to put in highlights. You can control the reflectance from the silver cards by using dulling spray. You might keep some bright and some muted for different kinds of reflectance. Some people use mirrors, which work well. I don't because I travel a lot and they're fragile, so I carry a lot of cards. And you need clamps – spring clamps, little clips, clothespins – which you can use to stand the cards up against whatever is around – bottles of spray, blocks, books, etc.

VC: So you just keep moving the lights around . . .

SC: Till you like what you see through the viewfinder.

VC: Bounce the light off the cards, bounce it off the ceiling, the walls . . .

SC: Only if you've got white ceiling and walls. I think if someone is serious about doing this, they don't need to invest a lot of money, but they should get a good aluminum stand and something like a Tota-light and an umbrella. You can do a heck of a lot of work with one Tota-light and a few cards. You can also make your own diffusing screens. Frosted acetate is an excellent diffuser and is the safest to use. It reduces a spotlight's harshness without absorbing too much intensity. There are many other materials you can use, even tracing paper if it is placed far enough from the bulb so it doesn't ignite. Be careful where you place diffusers. The lights use quartz halogen bulbs, which get very hot and can melt or burn screens. The bulbs are stable in color temperature and last about 400 hours. They come in 500, 750 and 1000 watt sizes, but 500 is fine. A 1000 is just one stop brighter than a 500, and it's a lot hotter.

VC: With this lighting, do you still need to cover up the room's windows?

SC: At least pull the shades or curtains. It depends on the subject matter and how bright the sun is. With mixed light, your eye doesn't notice the change. Nothing seems wrong until you take a picture and see a tiny area where something is screwy. Maybe the area is blue and the rest of the image looks good. This is caused by daylight coming in and affecting the background. Or maybe everything looks right but there's a big bluish streak across the object. If it were white or silver, it would look like a normal highlight.

VC: Even with a small aperture and long exposure, there seems to be a problem getting some objects totally in focus. Is there a solution to this problem?

SC: The depth of field in a 35mm camera is parallel to the film plane. As you stop down the lens, the depth of field extends farther in space in front of and behind the plane of focus. If the subject is flat or very shallow, you need to stop down only 3 or 4 stops. But with three-dimensional objects, you may need to stop down to f16 or smaller to get the whole thing sharp.

VC: Why not always use the smallest aperture?

SC: Stopping down causes a long shutter speed, which may cause slight color shift and introduce diffraction problems. That's very complicated, very abstruse. It's a technical problem that falls within the "circle of confusion," which seems quite large sometimes.

VC: That's a great term.

SC: If you spend too many days working alone in your studio, the circle of confusion can encompass the whole house. But, to get back to our subject, if you're photographing a bowl, for example, there's going to be a gradual diminution of sharpness. The farther edge will gradually become more blurred. You have to compromise. One of the advantages of the view camera is that you can change the relationship of the film plane to the lens plane to the subject plane. To keep everything sharp, you tilt the lens over until the planes extended from these three areas arrive at a common point, they intersect. You can't do that with most 35mm lenses. You can with a couple of them, but they're wide-angle lenses, strangely enough. There is also something called a bellows unit for special macro lenses, which works sort of like a miniature view camera. It's a sophisticated little gizmo and fairly expensive. It's certainly not a necessity.

VC: It seems that the alternative is to accept some level of blurriness if you're photographing certain objects with a small-format camera.

SC: There are optical limits to this business. One of the advantages of macro lenses is that they will usually stop down to f32, which gives you that small aperture. The image has got to go out of focus somewhere unless you shove everything farther away. You might think, why not push the subject farther away so the depth of field will increase. It will at a given aperture, but then if you blow it up to the size you want, you have the same problem plus larger grain. You don't gain anything at all. Some people say small-format lenses have greater depth of field than large format. It's not true. Optically they follow a law. Once you blow up a slide to the same proportions as an 8 x 10 at a given aperture, you're going to have the same depth of field. If you shoot both at f22 and blow them up to the same degree, they will have the same depth of field if they were shot from the same relative position.

VC: Let's say somebody has made a bowl that is wide, not too tall, but for some reason, perhaps the work they've done on the side of it, they want to be able to show the side. They may lose the farther edge in order to show the detail in front.

SC: Yes, you have to sacrifice something. What some people won't admit is that it sometimes requires more than one shot to show an object. If you're limited to publishing or submitting just one slide, you have to pick the optimum. You can overcome that problem by choosing the best point of view and the greatest clarity. Usually the simplest approach works best. You don't want the photography to overwhelm the power or the beauty of the object, so why not just let it appear?

VC: What is the best way to capture texture and detail? I guess that is both a lighting and depth of field question.

SC: You don't need a bright light if you can bring the light pretty close to a small subject. Top light or light from above works well, and you can usually get that with the Tota-light or something similar. But sometimes everything's too tight – you've got the tripod and the light stand on legs and you're crashing into them and the legs of the table – so you get a boom. Another purchase, but it may not need to be more than 2 or 3 feet long. Put the light on the end of that and a counterweight on the other end.

VC: Are there special lighting setups you recommend?

SC: A very good trick for lighting a tabletop setup – I learned this from Lee Bolton, who was a master at museum photography – is to place secondary lights just below the surface of the table. You can use several lights. One is above as the main light, and it throws a shadow. The others are placed just below the surface of the table on each side, so that their light illuminates only the subject, not the background, and they don't make shadows. Think about it – shadows occur because one area of the background is more brightly lit than the rest. The shadow part doesn't get darker; the light part gets lighter.

VC: We make the assumption that shadows are dark when in fact they are simply areas that are not lit.

SC: Right. It's tempting to fill the shadow with light. Most people put a second light on the shadow, but then they throw another shadow and also mess up the ratio. Every light you put on the background just creates another shadow. To get rid of that shadow, you can take shiny silver cards and tilt them to catch light and soften the shadow. I'm always trying to teach people that shadows are not wrong. Of course, deep, dead shadows may be distracting, but shadow can give definition and separate the object from the background and give it a little dimension.

VC: It seems to me that we could quickly run into the problem of filling with too much light.

SC: You have to put light where it's dark and subtract light where it's light. Now and then there are things that are uniform in tone or reflectance and you need to introduce some contrast, but in the right place and not in such a large area that it wipes out texture. A polished gold object should have shine, but not everywhere because it wouldn't look like gold if it was all highlight – it would be silver or white. You wouldn't know what it was made of if it reflected too much light. You want some gradation of subtleties in the highlights, so you let some blacks come in, grays and blacks. You can do that with black cards or just what's out in the room not reflecting light. But you do have to be careful with shiny things – what they're reflecting.

VC: Yes, one jeweler wanted me to ask, "How do I get myself out of the picture?" That's down to the real basics.

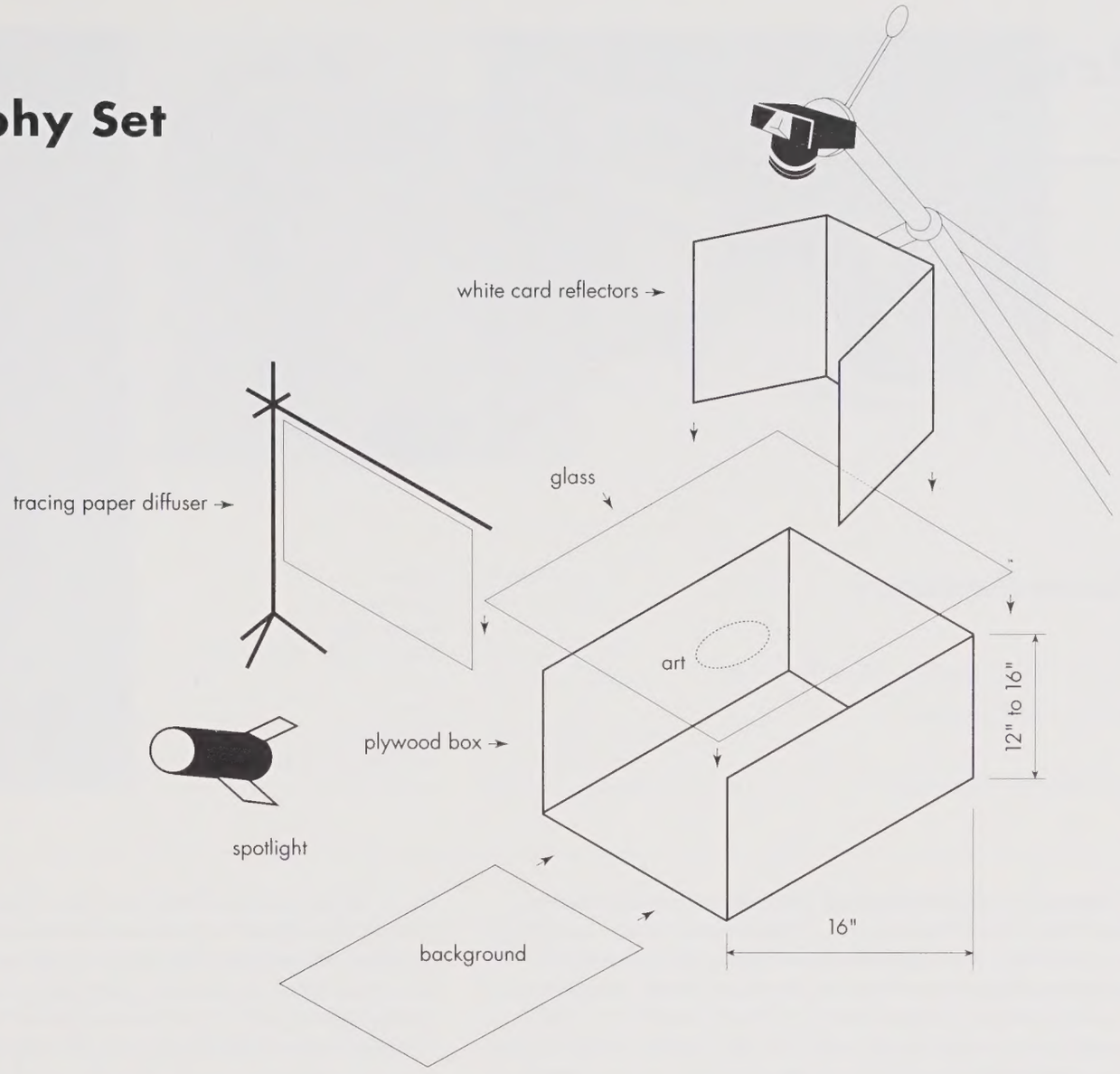
SC: A simple solution is to hang white paper or card between two stands and place it between yourself and the setup. You cut a little hole for the lens. In extreme cases you can build what's called a tent, which is a three-sided box about 3 or 4 feet square on each side. You tape white or light gray seamless paper to a frame and cut a small hole for the lens. However, if you're going to be photographing a lot of small objects, I especially recommend a vertical setup [see next page], which is fairly simple to construct and uses just one light. It "floats" the object you are photographing on a piece of nonglare glass and allows you to change backgrounds quickly and easily.

VC: This has been enlightening and it seems we have just touched the surface. Those who want more complete information are sure to find it in your book, which I recommend highly.

SC: Thank you.

Virginia Croft, interim editor of *Metalsmith*, is an editor and writer living in New York City.

Vertical Photography Set



This set can be constructed inexpensively to photograph small objects such as jewelry and vessels from high angles. Make the modified box of ¾" plywood, about 12 inches wide and 16 inches deep, with a height of 12 to 16 inches. Leave the top and one end open. Paint the interior walls white, or tape white paper to them, to reflect into the sides of your subjects (such as ring shanks), so that their original colors are not contaminated with background reflections.

Cut a piece of background material (paper, cloth or tile) to fit snugly inside the bottom of the box. Raise or lower it for the desired textural effect. Place a piece of nonglare picture glass, slightly larger than box, on the open top above the background. Tape the edges of the glass for safety.

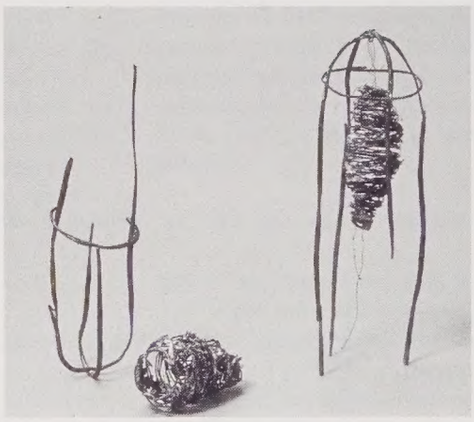
Place your subject on the glass, and frame it in your camera viewfinder. Make a reflector by taping together three pieces of stiff, pure white cardboard, and place it near the subject. Depending on the focal length of your lens and the sizes of your subjects, you may need reflectors in a couple of heights, say, 6 inches and 14 inches. Aim a focusing spotlight (or pan light) at the subject from a distance of about 4 feet, and diffuse it with a sheet of 100% cotton rag tracing paper taped to a boom placed near the open end of the box. Take care not to ignite the paper with the light. This paper diffuser is now the light source; raising and lowering it and moving it nearer to or farther from the subject will affect the lighting quality. Keep it far enough from the subject to prevent glare in the glass. To make the background lighter, let raw light spill under the diffuser; to make the background darker, double the paper hanging below the glass.

You can add fill light from the "top" by laying another stiff white card, 11 x 14" (not illustrated), on top of the three-sided white card reflector. Cut a peephole just large enough for the lens to see through. A second boom may be needed to hold this card. Open the barndoor on the spotlight and tilt the card to catch light spilling onto it. If your background is very dark, this card may create glare in the glass, so use it with discretion. If this card is not used, close the top barndoor to keep camera reflections off the glass.

For further lighting refinement, cut small rectangles of various sizes from shiny silver card and place them on the glass, leaning against the three-sided reflector card. Angled properly, these shiny cards will add sparkling highlights to your subject.

Some finesse is needed to get the tripod legs out of the way: make the back leg longer to tilt the tripod over the set, and secure it with a counterweight such as a sandbag, or the camera may smash through the glass (and your subject)! To get the set to a comfortable working height, you may want to raise it on another box or stool.

— SC



Sharon Portelance

Wheeler Seidel Gallery, New York, NY
May 21 – July 2, 1992

by Carolanne Patterson

ABOVE
Inversion
copper, steel
object on right: 9 x 2½", 1992

RIGHT
Self-Portrait
electroformed copper
9 x 31", 1991

In the recent exhibition of Sharon Portelance's work, one encounters a group of objects that relate directly to nature through their organic properties yet allude to a more personal, emotionally charged intimacy. The artist explores her own femininity and vulnerability through contradictions resulting in intended ambiguity. The inconsistences in the forces of human nature and the implied conflict between inside and outside are continually explored. The forms make direct reference to the vessel, although the vessel as departure point seems the more important issue. Through handling of the material, the variation of surface texture, and the overt processing of metal, nature and the abstract converge with irregular consistency.

Nest-like forms, the smaller and most endearing work in the group, establish fragile connections among themselves. *Inversion* includes a cocoon-shaped nest, tenuously connected, dangling with fragile beauty from an arch-shaped armature. Next to it lies a similar shape, unconnected from its accompanying armature, lying on its side. A sense of danger is evident, the unpredictable assertions of the overwhelming world. These lyrical shapes, formed by swirls of paper-thin metal and wire, correspond structurally to the architecture of a bird's nest; however, these nests suggest a bed of sharp edges, a home of a precarious nature.

Hidden within several of the smaller pieces are forms that contradict the predominantly organic aesthetic. A small sewer grate reveals itself within a vessel. A needle or spoon shape marks the introduction of industry. Manufactured and mechanical references are placed together with pods, cocoons and odd organic shapes which uncoil and intertwine, mysteriously coexisting with apparent ease.

Matters of the Heart incorporates the anomalous use of gold to illustrate the precious nature of this small shadow-forming piece. A private, nonspecific richness is cast upon the work, which glimmers in the surrounding decay. The simplest of the group, it stands out among the spoiled remains of its environs, providing an almost celestial quality.

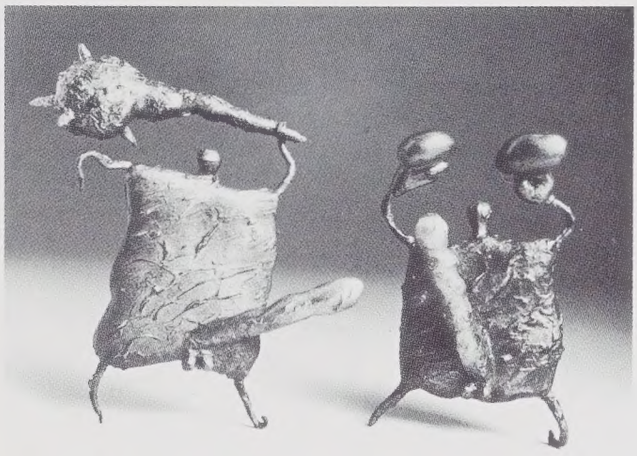
Self-Portrait, one of the larger works, illustrates the vessel merging with the female figure in an almost macabre yet balanced and forthright way. The sexuality of the piece is suggested through life and birth rather than desire and pleasure. Although the structure seems to perish at certain angles, growth is evident in the form of leaves and blossoms emerging unexpectedly and erotically from the small of the back, which is, not coincidentally, the middle of the vessel. The crumbling form reveals a hidden or latent life as a small shoot grows from a dead and putrefying tree.

The larger forms utilize the electroforming process on an unusually vast scale and become disparate to the smaller, more delicate pieces. Each piece exposes its wire skeleton, covering only enough to semi-complete the form. The figural aspects of these pieces create a more cumbersome whole when compared to the smaller constructions of thin copper and wire. As sculpture, they confront issues connecting anatomy and autobiography, archaeology and history. The artist's dramatic cutting into these forms suggests a violent undertone. Imperfections caused by the maker and the surface of acid-treated copper create an equally enigmatic display of violation.

These exploratory works pay homage to the beauty and intrinsic value of copper. The use of patina is minimal, mostly achieved through the heating of the metal. The larger pieces are doused with a layer of oil, creating a shiny yet darkened surface. Darkness prevails among the earth-toned, autumn colors, the perishing of organic material being Portelance's main concern.

Most of the forms are hollow and vertical, yet the traditional term hollowware cannot be attributed because of their fragmentary nature. That which disintegrates embodies our social experiences. The archetypal forms of the vessel and the nest inherently touch something that is essential in the chord of human emotions. With these works, the viewer can become aware of what has passed and what the future holds. Reality is limited, but through these dialectical references, one is left with the questioning aspects of Portelance's challenge.

Carolanne Patterson is a graduate student in the metals department, State University of New York, New Paltz.



Bruce Metcalf: New Wooden Jewelry

Jewelerswerk Galerie, Washington, DC
April 2 – 23, 1992

by Lee Fleming

LEFT TO RIGHT

Wood Pin #73
3½ x 2½", 1991

Wood Neckpiece #5
14½ x 10½", 1992

Wood Pins #81 and #80
(Testosterone Guys)
painted wood, brass, 3½" h., 1991

Bronze powder, oil paint and found materials transform carved pieces of maple into social commentary in the most recent work of sculptor/jeweler Bruce Metcalf. "Guerilla jewelry" in the best sense, they demand a great deal from both wearer and watcher. Whether brooches or neckpieces, the objects are not shy about confronting the beholder, requiring that we focus on the ironic political and social messages conveyed by Metcalf's materials and forms.

His pins feature cartoon-like figures that seem a cross between Bart Simpson and E.T. the Extraterrestrial, yet their sly cat's eyes and curled fetal forms also evoke less innocent aliens. In *Wood Pin #73* (1991), one of these creatures is shown in profile, a single huge glass cat's eye studying the brass cube held gingerly between its two thin "arms." Its enigmatic attitude arrests our attention, no mean feat considering Metcalf has covered this homunculus with pinto-spotted felt. Even when the artist confines himself to relatively tame surface treatments, as in *Wood Pin #64* (1990), where bronze powders give a rich texture to the underlying maple, the addition of a coxcomb and a grinning, brownish-white football-stitch mouth imparts a mock-macho twist to his figure.

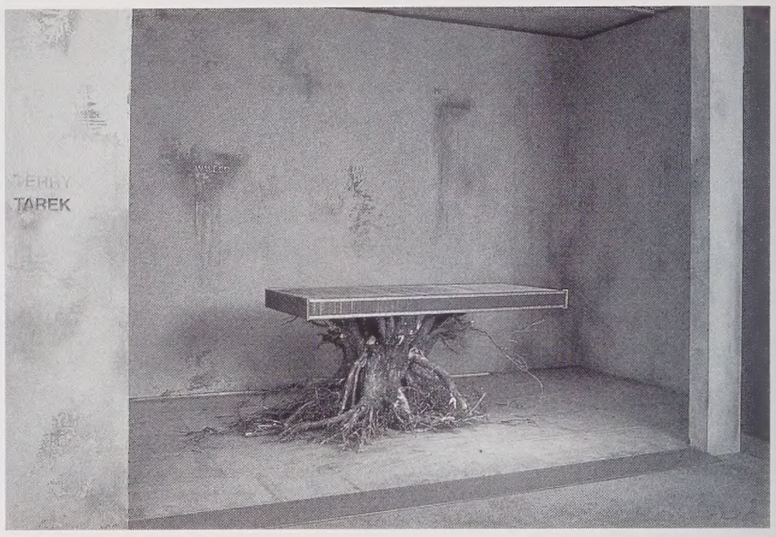
Male aggression is definitely one subject under scrutiny, as two playful but pointed pins from 1991 attest. Officially labeled *Wood Pin #80 (Testosterone Guy)* and *Wood Pin #81 (Testosterone Guy)*, their titles ensure that we don't miss the message. In one, an amorphous, tiny-headed figure somewhat like an early Henry Moore crossed with a marine egg sac brandishes a massive studded club, almost matched in size by a rampant penis/club. His partner hoists boxing gloves and boulders overhead, but the main attraction is the gnarly penis that rises slightly higher than his "shoulder." The comic yet biting visual puns keep the commentary light without diluting their powerful effect.

However, the show's *tours de force* are the wooden neckpieces that demonstrate Metcalf's superb jeweler's sensibility and extraordinary feel for texture and telling detail. In *Wood Neckpiece #6* (1992), our eye skips around, from smooth, lustrous wooden shapes like elongated barbells or wooden pieces like those advertised to help massage the neck, to balls of cork, to exquisitely veined and finished wooden eggs, to spiraled driftwood twigs, to a beautifully gold-checked bead, finally fetching up at the pendant, a dragon-toothed alien whose round glass pupil and open mouth indicate considerable, if indefinable, distress.

Wood Neckpiece #5 (1992) is the most ambitious – and successful – piece in the exhibition. Again, we have the wooden barbell-bone-massager as the section that rests against the neck. But the counterpoint of textures that Metcalf undertakes to hang from this starting point is startling and daring. Segments of wood, still rough with bark, join up with lovingly polished wood balls and eggs in connections that, once in place, seem inevitable but must have required enormous thought to exploit the continuum of a sheen, a texture or a grain direction.

Plastics and metals are deftly integrated. A geometric shape cut from Corian seems just right for its place. Lengths of hardware and steel cable, rubbed in some cases with pigment to visually "join" the natural and manmade materials, complement rather than war against the organic objects with which they share the necklace. The piece ends in a large, purplish bronze creature with staring eye, an unnerving climax to the subtleties of the necklace and yet, again, somehow just right. Metcalf's greatest gift seems to be his uncanny ability to blend elements both absurd and beautiful into a coherent and striking whole without lessening the impact of either aspect.

Lee Fleming, a freelance critic, writes for City Paper *in Washington and several national art publications.*



Mary Ann Peters
Find the Syrian Boys
1992 installation, mixed media
9½ x 19 x 11′

Of Magic, Power & Memory: Contemporary and International Jewelry

Bellevue Art Museum, Bellevue, WA
April 25 – May 31, 1992

by William Baran-Mickle

The Bellevue Art Museum has the unusual position of being located in a major shopping mall in the burgeoning Pacific Northwest. It is therefore a fascinating situation that a major international jewelry exhibition peers down on boutiques and cafes and yet is the ancestral home of a rich variety of native cultures. Keeping this heritage of place in mind, curator Diane M. Douglas included works from many native cultures from around the world. One-third of the exhibitors are from the region itself. The 160 works on display were created by 39 makers.

Two very special aspects of this exhibition should be pointed out. The first is the extensive geographic scope of works from Northern and Southern Hemisphere countries. Interestingly, only a handful of works are anthropological in nature, that is, are not contemporary works of the last two decades. This is useful to connect traditional adornment to contemporary ornament.

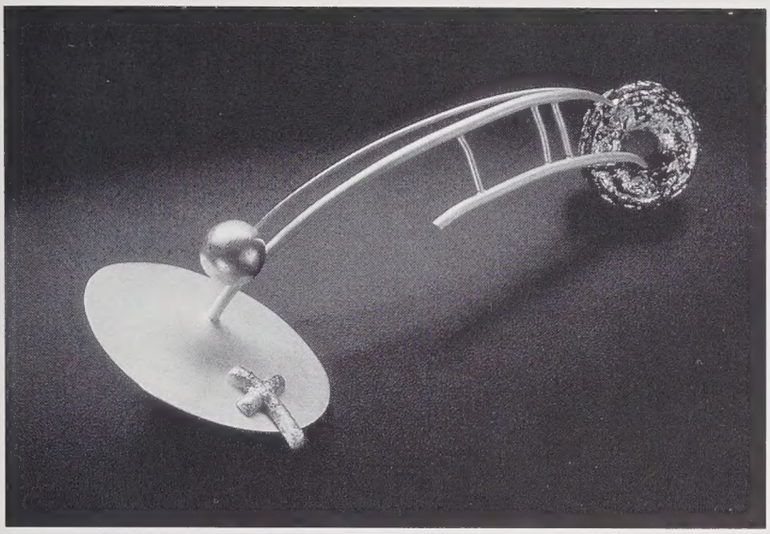
The second aspect is the conceptual scope of the works chosen. The diversity of approaches ranges from actual jewelry, being decorative, wearable and meaningful, to large installations that reflect and expand on the idea of jewelry.

Wall statements and a brief catalog accompanied the exhibition. They were particularly helpful in understanding the installation works by Mary Ann Peters and Jill Slosburg-Ackerman. Their works are as far-reaching in their conceptual statement as Otto Kunzli's shoulder brooches of hard foam and wallpaper were to the 1980s (four of his works were in this show). These two women have pushed the envelope of what the idea of jewelry can be.

Peters' installation, *Find the Syrian Boys,* occupies an entire room. A large aluminum box rests heavily upon a wild, uprooted tree trunk. The surrounding walls are painted in a melancholy array of colors where bits of words emerge revealing names. The top of the box is open yet nearly opaque due to a deep-walled, closely patterned grid. Not until the viewer leans over and physically inquires of its contents do shadowy photographs appear. The photographs are old family portraits of Peters' family at the time they emigrated to America from Syria. The sole process and installation operates on the idea of the cameo portrait.

Jill Slosburg-Ackerman's installation, *Sighting,* is a trapezoid-shaped cloister 5 feet 2 inches tall (the artist's height) of thick white plaster walls. It is open at the narrow end, just wide enough to enter. This challenges one's sense of safety and future. The inner walls have jewelry-like objects embedded in them. The root of this concept comes from sarcophagi in a 12th-century monastery in Montmajour, France. Slosburg-Ackerman sees this object-place as a grave-vessel. This one speaks of its maker, its details keyed to the maker's life and work. Its design successfully creates an emotional experience.

There were other examples of architectural jewelry. Pam Beyette's *Industrial Medallion,* for instance, stretching 18 feet long, is made of industrial debris such as copper pipe and computer circuit boards which are bound in the center and bow gently to either side. The found materials have been re-embellished with color and foil to visually enliven the presentation. These works of architectural jewelry, like the previous ones, clearly attempt to join their sister media in crossing boundaries from their jewelry form status to that of architectural ornamentation and fine art.



Jung-Hoo Kim
Life in the Circus brooch
sterling silver, gold foil, rubber
4½" h., 1987

Stuart Buehler
He Comes in Many Guises, Many More Than Christ necklace
cow bone, 5 x 5 x ½", c. 1982
courtesy Jamison Thomas Gallery

Micki Lippe's three sterling pendants called *Spirit Houses* are hope-filled architecture for the person. Simple in their design, they are the new age, nondenominational version of the Jewish mezuzah. European jewelers Otto Kunzli, Gerd Rothman and Manfred Bischoff also display jewelry as body architecture in ground-breaking styles that use unlikely materials and question what jewelry is and where it belongs. These works felt slightly out of place in the context of a body of work overwhelmingly dealing with spiritual and cultural seriousness.

Personally and culturally expressive works were well represented. Denise Wallace's narrative pins and belt show intricate Aleut figures with masks that open to reveal sensitively rendered bone faces. *Walrus Shaman, Dancer* and *Woman Figures* locate her contemporary personal and culturally shared issues in a way that respects traditional roots, though with contemporary flair and innovation.

Works from other native cultures (Thailand, Africa, Plains Indian and others) were refreshing to see and seemed to show contemporary works with their traditional purposes and meanings intact (i.e., wedding ceremonial accessories). A substantial number of what I will call "American-International" artists appeared to be purposely co-mingling the artifacts and styles of various cultures, to comment on our own society or perhaps to bask in the beauty of other cultures.

This axis of the exhibition was exemplified by Ramona Solberg, who utilizes a respectful appropriation of cultural artifacts, and Ron Ho, who uses them for abstract portraiture. The next generation may well be represented by Kiff Slemmons and the collaborative works of Kim Overstreet and Robin Kranitsky. Slemmons appropriates the Plains Indian chest-plate format for two neckpieces titled *Hunt and Pectoral* and *Sticks and Stones*. She replaces the rows of beadwork with crisply sharpened pencils or typewriter key structures to create the pattern field. Overstreet/Kranitsky make use of found objects to present social issues and make references to individual emotions such as loneliness. These have an odd yet intriguing presence.

Jung-Hoo Kim's *Life in the Circus* and Sara Sanford's jewelry stand out as spare poetic works. The exemplify the strengths that contemporary reverential jewelry can have, and spoke for the Power and Memory segment in the show.

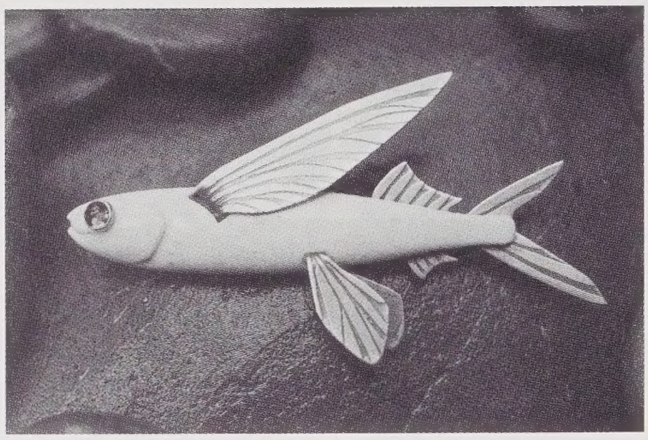
There was an interesting group of artists who use cow bone for contemporary scrimshaw work. Of these, Stuart Buehler's series *For the Bone Man* (for example, *He Comes in Many Guises, Many More Than Christ*) stands out for its contemporary imagery, arrangements of elements and coloration, as well as a high degree of sensitivity to the bone as a sophisticated material. Susan Ford's work is closer to traditional imagery (animals, insects) but shares Buehler's finesse for re-energizing a folk art practice.

The overall quality of this exhibition was extremely high. With the inclusion of works by Robert Ebendorf, William Harper and Kai Chan, to name just three, there were far too many works and far too many subissues to mention. It would have been wonderful if this exhibition could have lived longer as a traveling show.

William Baran-Mickle is a metalsmith and writer living near Rochester, NY.

RIGHT
Alexandra Connell
Flying Fish
beef bone, silver, tourmaline
1 x 2¼"

FAR RIGHT
Judith Hoffman
Now She Holds the Sky in Her Hands
sterling silver,
copper, glass bead, fabricated
4½ x 2 x ½", 1991



"Metalworks" Metal Arts Guild Juried Exhibition

Velvet DaVinci Gallery, San Francisco, CA
April 22 – May 15, 1992

by Kris Patzlaff

The Velvet DaVinci Gallery in San Francisco was host to the Metal Arts Guild juried members exhibition entitled "Metalworks." The Metal Arts Guild, whose membership is based primarily in the San Francisco Bay Area, has a long history of providing exhibition opportunities, lectures and workshops. The jurors, Dawn Nakanishi, Chuck Escott and Mike Holmes, chose 71 pieces representing 27 jewelry and metal artists from the membership.

The collection of work was predominantly jewelry, with some sculpture and other objects as well. Among the nonjewelry works was Jeff Wind's bronze sculpture *Farewell to the Good Seuss: Death in a Child's Eyes,* which invited the viewer to explore the tenuous positioning of identifiable objects piled "so high" in characteristically Dr. Seuss fashion. Unfortunately, this sculpture was presented so that is was difficult, if not impossible, to walk around, as it demanded the viewer to do.

A creation of both technical and physical beauty was Jo Ann Donivan's untitled box. The lid was fabricated with pierced and chased silver, creating vines and leaves with a veil-like quality over polished agate. The bottom of the box was constructed of wood, leading the eye to the delicate use of mokume-gané for the panels of each side of the container. Donivan's attention to subtle detail and surface treatment is tastefully ornate, a testimony to her understanding of scale within design.

Diane Otwell's fabricated silver box, *Reliquary to the Child I Was,* was more narrative in nature. Adorned with wings and a rose quartz stone on the lid, the box was placed upon a pedestal of four cast silver babies. Held within was the artist's baby tooth, lying preciously on a pink satin pillow.

Most of the jewelry in this exhibition was conceived in silver, brass and copper, and stones. However, the concerns, concepts and devices expressed and used by the artists went in many different directions. The only piece of gold jewelry was Gloria Bumb's delicately woven bracelet of gold wire with an exquisite tube catch encrusted with tiny gems on the surface. It was a fine example of goldsmithing.

Diane Robert's earrings investigated hollow forms of geometric shapes with clean line and surface treatment. Alexandra Connell's brooches, *Flying Fish* and *Flounder,* were representational depictions of fish. The carved bone bodies were complimented by the etched silver surface of the fins in these well-designed and constructed pieces of wearable jewelry.

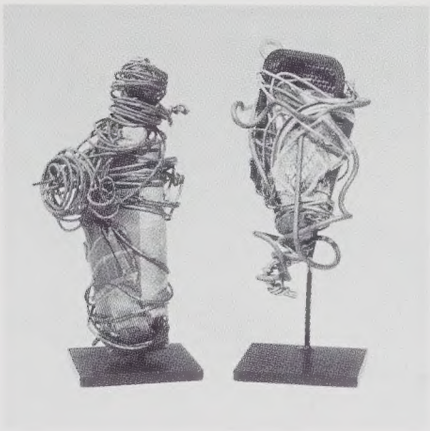
Among the jewelry in the exhibition were works that displayed a strong sense of narration. Judith Hoffman's pieces, fabricated of silver, copper, brass and found objects, were of beings that related a story, myth or comment. *Now She Holds the Sky in Her Hands* was a brooch of copper and silver in the form of a woman pierced and textured with stars. Most of the woman's torso consisted of a heart-shaped glass bead; her arms extended over her head holding a piece of the night sky. A relationship was created between the darkness within us and the darkness of the night sky, and mystery they both hold. Other pieces worth noting were Carol Windsor's brooch, *Heart Piece,* a cast silver broken heart with delicate streams of assorted colored stones flowing outward, and Katie Leong's elegantly conceived textured silver chopsticks with pillows.

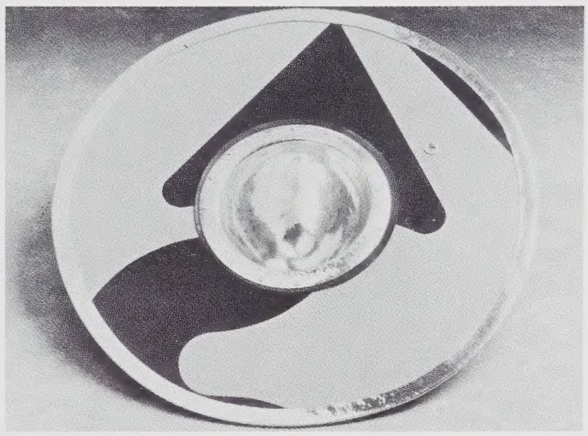
This MAG exhibition is the first since the one held during the SNAG conference in San Francisco two years ago. Interestingly, it included many jewelry and metal artists who are not as well known as those in the prior exhibition. It was refreshing to see the less publicized work of these talented metalsmiths.

Kris Patzlaff is a jewelry artist and teacher living in Trinidad, CA.

RIGHT
Philadelphia Wireman
#518 and *#539*
wire and paper
5½ x 3 x 2″
courtesy Janet Fleisher Gallery
photo by Norinne Betjemann

FAR RIGHT
Boris Bally and ROY
Pointless Bowl
raised and fabricated silver,
reused aluminum sign, rubber sheet
4 x 18½ x 18½″





Revolving Techniques: Clay, Glass, Metal and Wood

James A. Michener Art Museum, Doylestown, PA
March 28 – May 24, 1992

by Gail M. Brown

An exhibition catalog, *Revolving Techniques* (25 pages, illustrated in black and white), is available for $8.00 postage paid from The Wood Turning Center, P.O. Box 25706, Philadelphia, PA 19144.

Three curatorial points of view and four media explorations were integrated to present a survey of the "revolving" process at the James A. Michener Art Museum. The exhibition placed an emphasis on education: descriptive statements were posted to explain mastery of process and technique and to reference the relationship to mass production. The manipulation of process was examined, pointing to individual investigation for creative expression. There was reference made to the process-as-metaphor for content-related concerns.

The nature of the work exhibited relied heavily on function, control, elegance and symmetry. The 26 artists represented were, in most cases, well-known and in mid-career. The installation spread the examples of each medium throughout the gallery. That, plus the inability to view much of the art closely or from all sides, interfered with the emphasis on education. The medium with the broadest range of expression exhibited was metal.

The form of Lynne Hull's copper *Basket #24* (1992) echoes the revolving process. Its symmetrical, accordion-like body is topped with a generous handle of slight irregularity, whose gesture warms the classic form. Its mottled surface enriches the serenity of the form, also referencing the historic tradition of turned metal.

Richard Mawdsley's sterling silver *Feast Goblet* (1985-86) celebrates a wedding and the specific couple being honored. It stands elegantly as a formal statement in the custom of metal vessels. The use of a watchmaker's lathe allowed for the miniaturization of a still life within the design of the stem, addressing the artist's interest in the realism of the 1970s coupled with specific technology.

Wendy Ramshaw, the only jeweler represented, focuses on the presentation of jewelry as sculpture to be enjoyed when not on the body. Her ring stands range from various metals to turned Perspex. *Gold Ring With Stand* (1990) presents a structure of graduated nickel sections rising as a Deco tower, scored with echoing vertical incisions. It holds a single thin gold ring with a long projectile, ending in a directional arrow which parallels the finger.

Sleek formalism marks the bottlecork sculpture of Boris Bally. In *Kalimba* (1989), the turned silver, ebony, aluminum and gold plate rhythmically balance function with imagination. The contrast and variety of forms and surface enrich the scale. The investigation of the design potential of this object supersedes its utility and suggests unlimited possibilities.

Laura Marth's turned functional objects of anodized aluminum are imbued with warmth and wit. *Spread Knife and Fork* (1992) are formed with spirited flare. They combine skilled technique with personality. The spreader is flame shaped with hinged, decorative end pieces. Her palette is rich and subtle; she explores fully the broad color potential of this process.

Boris Bally and ROY collaborate on sculptural objects, their latest a Paleoicon Vessel Series addressing awareness of the environment and the revolving process of recycling. Strong graphic images are juxtaposed with hand-raised silver forms, common and precious metals, old and new. This work integrates historic metal techniques with found objects. *Pointless Bowl* (1991) combines silver, reused aluminum sign and rubber sheet to create a dramatic vessel, a statement about nonutility and current icons. The work is about contrast in concept and treatment.

The sculpture of the Philadelphia Wireman is made entirely of recycled materials. A large group of this unknown maker's hand-size, abstract pieces were found in the mid-1970s. In *Wire #539* (c. 1970) wrapped wire traps a red cardboard Chicklet box, a metal can lid and a red plastic bike reflector. The freedom of this hand-turned work exudes energy and spontaneity. Its emotional power belies its intimate scale. The enigmatic messages transcend the technique.

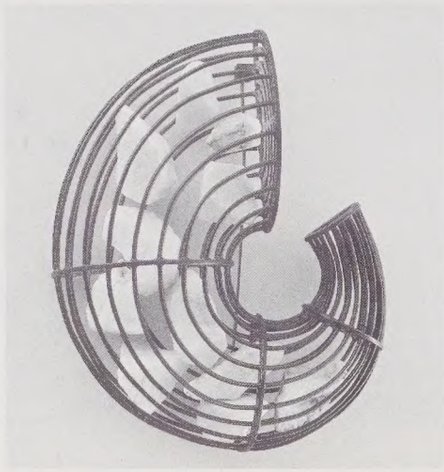
The Albert Paley *Lectern* (1989) of turned steel and brass also raises issues of contrast. The delicate-seeming ribbons which form the pedestal undulate gracefully, working upward to support the weighty top. This suggests both freedom and an underlying discipline of structure. The appearance of spontaneity heightens the drama, as distinguished from the permanence of the materials and the complexity of the process. This juxtaposition makes a powerful impact.

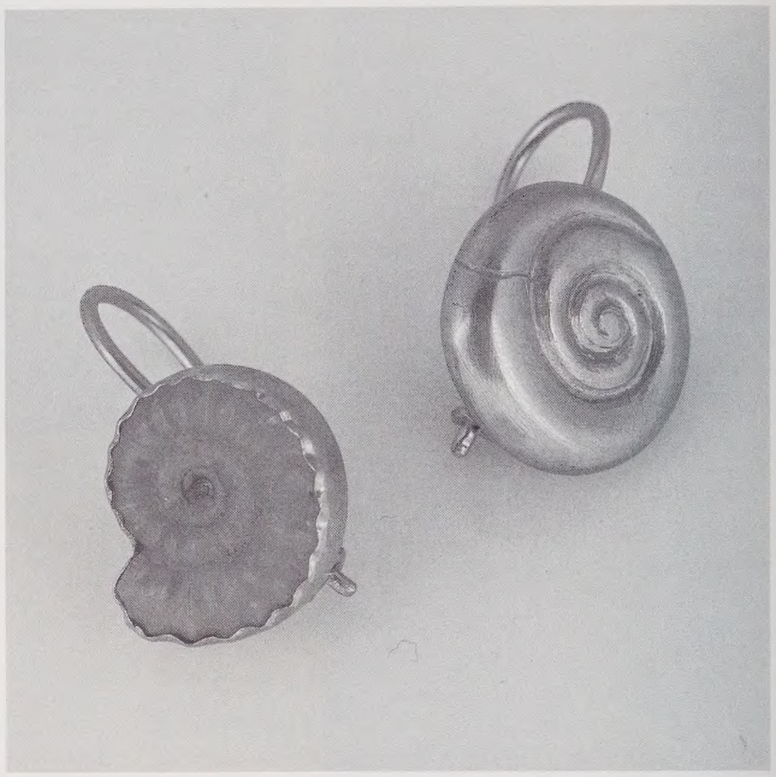
The show serves best as an introduction to the range of possibilities of turned work, inviting deeper investigation at another time and place. The strong work in metal serves well to exemplify the diversity waiting to be explored by the viewer.

Gail M. Brown lives in Philadelphia and writes on jewelry and fine crafts.

RIGHT
Joe Wood
spiral cage brooch
black-plated stainless steel
and brass, alabaster, 1988

FAR RIGHT
Jill Slosburg-Ackerman
Living in Two Worlds earrings
14K yellow gold, fossil, 1990





Crossroads

Artwear, New York, NY
May 14 – June 14, 1992

by Ellen Berkovitch

There is the very small and the very large, the whimsical and the serious. There is the traditional tweaked in a fresh way and the outlandish rendered familiar. Crossroads, Artwear's invitational exhibition featuring the work of 14 art jewelers from across the U.S., delivers a gamut of vocabularies and techniques representative of the provocative directions of the field. Notable is the integrity of the exhibition's displays with the natural positives of the work, the balanced representation of women and men, and the sense one has, on leaving, of having witnessed a diverse yet coherent breadth of talent that doesn't reveal a specific curatorial bias.

Four of the featured artists – Sandra Enterline, Kiff Slemmons, Bruce Metcalf and Donald Friedlich – have shown work at Artwear before. Ten are new to the gallery: Jill Slosburg-Ackerman, Eugene and Hiroko Pijanowski (working as a team), Rachelle Thiewes, James Cotter, Brent Guarisco, Joe Wood, Randy Long, Tibbie Dunbar, Gayle Saunders and Daniel Jocz.

Tibbie Dunbar achieves outstanding mobility with her *Quiet Invasion* series of brooches fabricated of rice paper and steel wire. Dunbar describes her work as an experiment with the "insidious." The shapes are fluid but oddly mutant, susceptible to lumps and bumps, much as a piece of detritus blown by the wind off a city street might appear.

Joe Wood, also showing brooches, forms stainless steel cages inside which he nests small alabaster pebbles. Reminiscent (at least in spirit) of Joseph Cornell collages in the way they evoke miniature universes, using a stripped-down vocabulary, the jewelry doesn't sacrifice wearability to its aesthetic.

Less successful by this criteria, to this viewer, are the *Oh! I Am Precious* paper cord (mizuhiki) neckpieces by Eugene and Hiroko Pijanowski and – at the other end of the size scale – the marble and gold *Drapery* brooches by Randy Long. Both deserve credit for manipulating materials not common to jewelry. Both are striking, even dramatic. But they fail to overcome an apparent difficulty: that of reconciling the demands of the material with its purpose of human decoration. Although the Pijanowski pieces are threadlike and light, they nevertheless appear cumbersome, performing best on a mannequin form. The marble in Long's work achieves the characteristics of draping common to sculpture but doesn't quite surmount a perception of flatness.

Truly original in the repertoire was jewelry that tweaked the form without sacrificing its application to the body. Brent Guarisco bundles amulets representing tools and utensils into necklace forms, inviting wearer interaction with the shapes and concepts they represent. Jill Slosburg-Ackerman deconstructs pairs (hers don't match) and encapsulates in her jewelry the unity achievable through a demonstration of parts. Bracelets by Rachelle Thiewes and James Cotter manage to hearken to architecture with references that heighten the distinction but don't obscure it.

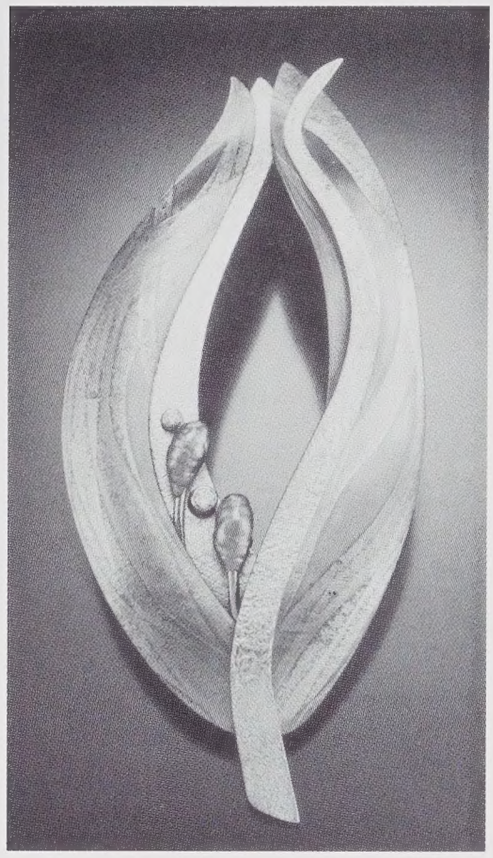
Finally, Kiff Slemmons presents work that is rich in association because of the homely objects that she makes precious – chewed-on pencils, a 33⅓ rpm record, metal hand shapes. In her ideal world, a piece of jewelry would be made of ice and last only an evening, leaving behind a sense impression on the skin of the wearer.

The good news for the art jewelry community and its devotees is that curator Robert Lee Morris has rededicated himself to providing a forum for the craft at Artwear. It carries a big stick.

Ellen Berkovitch, based in New York, writes frequently about fashion and the arts.

RIGHT
My Spirit Soars sculpture
sterling silver, niobium
14 x 12 x 8", 1992
photo by Bob Barrett

FAR RIGHT
Grey Wave brooch
14K and 18K gold,
sterling, niobium,
diamonds, freshwater pearls
3½ x 2 x 5", 1992



Betty Helen Longhi

De Novo Gallery, Palo Alto, CA
May 9 – June 20, 1992

by Carroll Lee

The finely crafted jewelry and sculpture of Betty Helen Longhi was on exhibit at the de Novo Gallery in Palo Alto, California, this spring. Fabricated from gold, silver, niobium and titanium, Longhi's highly individual work is often recognizable by the colors she produces from anodizing niobium and titanium.

The interpretation of the curvilinear forms found in nature has a long legacy among artisans. Beginning with members of the Art Nouveau movement, craftspeople have been translating these natural phenomena into their own individual perceptions of art in nature for generations. The elongated curve of the stem of a calla lily, the shape of a drop of water on a leaf, the texture of a stone that has been washed by decades of weathering, the changing colors of the seasons – all have found their way into Betty Longhi's visions of color and natural form.

A master of technique, the artist incorporates forging, shell forming and hammer texturing in her pieces. Although she is obviously inspired by nature, her pieces also reflect a preoccupation with the interpretation of movement and space. Her sculpture *My Spirit Soars* exemplifies this. At 14 inches high and 12 inches wide, the piece is meticulously fabricated from sterling silver and niobium. As the viewer moves around the sculpture, the slightest changes of light on angles provide a fluidity of motion.

As in the case of most of Longhi's works, color, not so much in pigmentation but in what happens to color across a three-dimensional surface, becomes an important element when viewing the pieces. This is especially important in the case of the reactive metals niobium and titanium, where the colors change subtly and only with the viewer's movement. So much of work being done today with niobium is superficial, letting the colors of the metal carry the design of the work. Not so in the case of Betty Longhi's work.

The sculptured plant form of her brooch *Grey Wave* illustrates the artist's clever use of niobium to enhance the flowing lines that feed into one another. The repetitions of movement, like swaying reeds, reverberate from the shimmering colors that play with reflections of light. Made with sterling, the piece is set off by two freshwater pearls and diamonds.

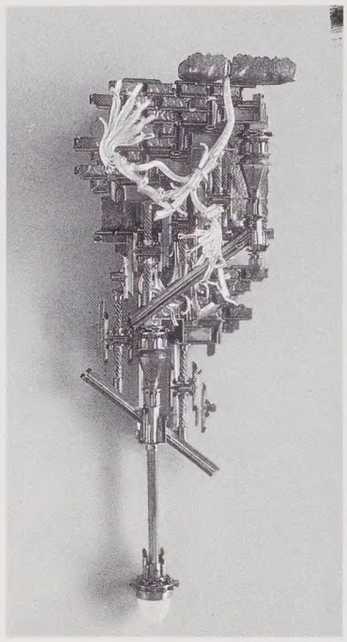
Another brooch, *Windswept,* also uses niobium to enhance its liquidity. A long sweep of subtle curvilinear line suggests a blade of grass that has been bent by the wind, its concave niobium center showing off colors that reflect onto the sterling silver shaft. Two long thin tendrils of 18-karat gold jut out from each side of the piece, wrapping under the far end of the blade, sensuously entwining. Freshwater pearls peek out from the broadest end to complete a quiet elegy to movement.

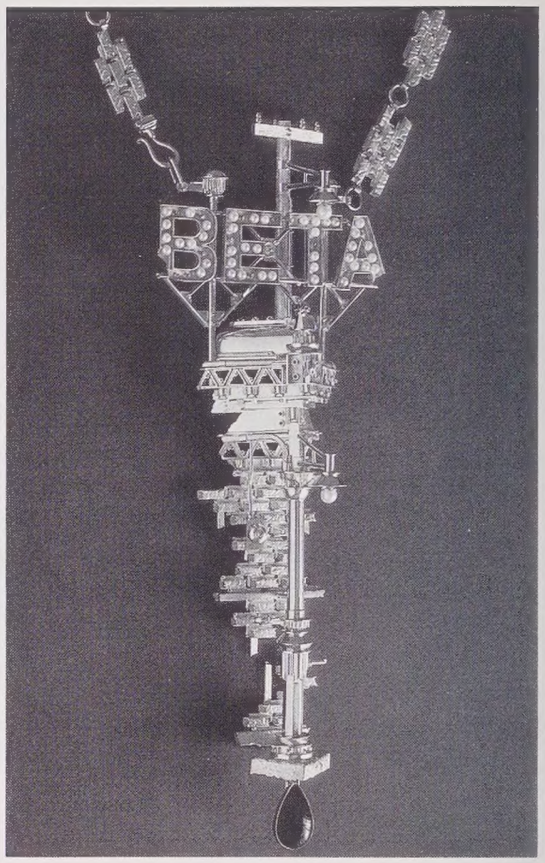
Betty Helen Longhi is an innovative artisan whose work reflects her strong capabilities at mastering complicated techniques, then interpreting them to fit her philosophy of design. Her jewelry and her sculptures grow out of one another – the jewelry pieces are small, wearable sculptures. Her sculptures are larger interpretations of those smaller pieces. Size determines the amount of movement and reflected light a piece will contain. They are enhanced by her knowledge of chemistry and the manipulation of metals. The combination of these elements results in a very personal statement articulated by an accomplished craftsperson.

Carroll Lee is an art historian who lives and works in Princeton, NJ.

RIGHT
Garden Stairs brooch
sterling silver, 18K gold, moonstone

FAR RIGHT
Beta pendant
18K gold, lapis lazuli, pearls





Richard Mawdsley New Work: Architectural Series

Mobilia Gallery, Cambridge, MA
April 15 – May 30, 1992

by Susan Barahal

While many metalsmiths in the 1960s were making highly polished hollowware and mirror-finished jewelry in the Scandinavian style, Richard Mawdsley was more interested in revalidating the baroque as a form of artistic expression and in embracing the history of precious metals. After nearly three decades of perfecting his craft and receiving accolades from several major museums, Mawdsley continues to create innovative objects, as is demonstrated by his recent show at Mobilia Gallery in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Mawdsley's metal objects combine the intricacy and fantasy of a Fabergé with the mechanical virtuosity of a Rube Goldberg. His creations compel the viewer to closely examine the many meticulous details and to be captivated by his sense of mechanical whimsy.

Mawdsley attributes his fascination with the mechanical to his youth and the many summers he spent on his grandparents' farm in Kansas. He recently returned to the farm and, seeing the wheat-harvesting combine from his childhood, realized how much of an influence this machine had had on his designs. Although Mawdsley never studied engineering, he seems innately comfortable with this world of machines and machine parts. Indeed, it has been the basis of his artistic expression.

The mechanical quality of architectural structures has also interested him, and his most recent work consists of an architectural series using precious metals. Although elements such as columns and entablatures are present in his earlier work, architectural structures now dominate.

The works in this series reveal the artist's almost exclusive use of metal tubing. Mawdsley relies on commercial tubing which he alters and assembles. Round or square tubing is often cut, flared, bent, squashed, engraved and combined with other materials to deviate from its original form. The advantage of using tubing in jewelry design is that it is thin (generally 30 gauge) yet quite strong. Rather large pieces can be constructed that are lightweight and wearable.

Indeed, the *Beta* neckpiece, depicting a wall fragment, is an example of a large yet wearable piece. This relief sculpture is made almost entirely of commercial gold tubing. Mawdsley engraves the surface of square tubing and forms shapes to look like brick. The complexity and three-dimensionality of these multi-leveled architectural elements are intriguing. One is captivated by such minute details as the pearls, which act as lightbulbs in the sign. However, as imperfect as fragments are, a few lights are missing. Mawdsley indicates the missing "bulbs" by omitting the pearls but leaving their gold post supports. The artist's fascination with technical ability is exemplified in this piece. Since dozens of soldering joints are required, the piece was created in sections and then assembled as a whole.

Another wall fragment design which reads as a classical relief sculpture is a highly textured 18K gold brooch. Again constructed almost entirely from tubing, this piece combines engraved bricks, a fluted Ionic column, a frieze and a bezeled lapis lazuli. The stone's delicate linear matrix echoes the bricks' engraving. One limitation in using tubing is that it does not easily lend itself to achieving organic forms. Therefore, in order to capture the plastic and fluid nature of plaster, Mawdsley uses wax to cast gold, which simulates plaster oozing out between the wall's laths.

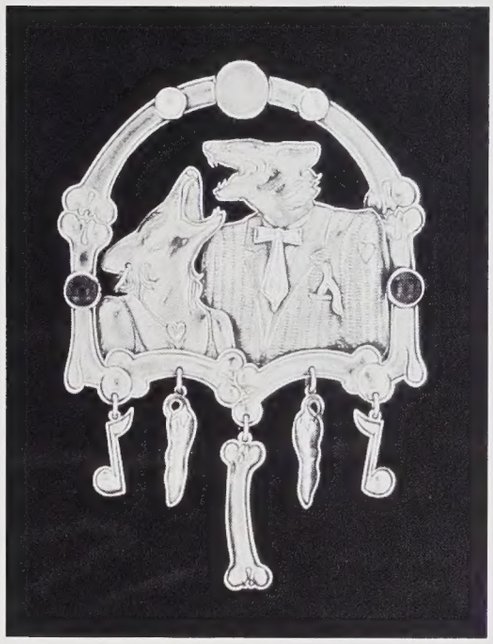
His *Garden Stairs* piece combines his earlier organic corsage motif with the architectural. Although the silver architectural elements clearly dominate in scale and mass, the plant form projects a strong presence and contrast to the straight-edged balustrade. The bush commands our attention, not only because of its placement in the foreground but also because of its bright yellow gold-plated color. The plant is both lyrical and figurative, somewhat evocative of Marcel du Champ's 1911 painting *Nude Descending a Staircase.*

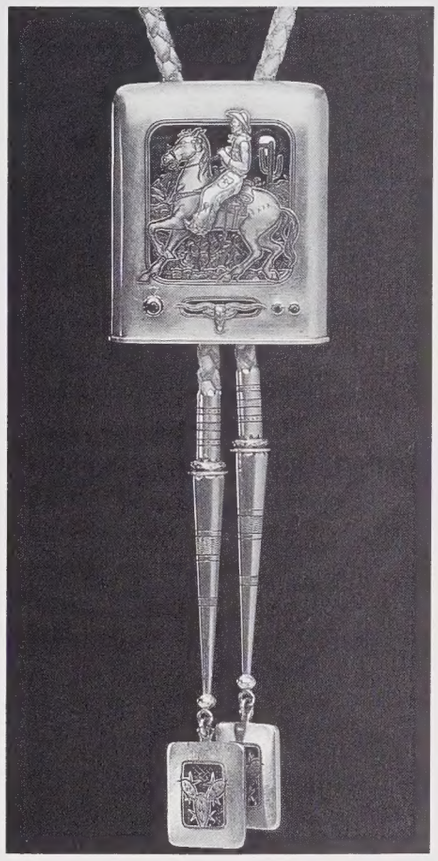
Mawdsley's work continues to mesmerize us with the abundant use of decorative mechanical flourishes and makes us smile because of its fanciful humor. His art makes us feel good as we realize how far technical and artistic abilities can be stretched.

Susan Barahal is the decorative arts editor for Art New England *and teaches art in the Boston area.*

RIGHT
Howling brooch
sterling silver,
18K yellow and pink gold,
moonstone, amethyst,
chromium diopside
2¼ x 3″

FAR RIGHT
Cowboy on TV bolo
sterling silver, 18K gold, copper,
brass, leather, garnets
center piece: 2½ x 2¾″





Kit Carson

Galeria Primitivo, Santa Monica, CA
May 2 – June 6, 1992

by Dorothy Spencer

Yahoo! The works of Kit Carson came to the Galeria Primitivo in Santa Monica, California, for the month of May. For those unfamiliar with the artist's pieces, they are a wild mixture of outrageous humor that soundly spoofs southwestern and fantasy themes. The objects range from a line of cast jewelry, to handmade, exquisitely crafted, one-of-a-kind pieces of jewelry, to knives, letter openers, clocks, lamps and small sculptures.

These days, with southwestern themes found on everything from toilet paper to bedspreads, it's hard to imagine taking coyotes barking at the moon, cowboy boots or cactus and giving them a fresh new turn. But Carson's work does just that. His bolo ties are made from silver and 18K gold, many set with semi-precious stones. The leather braided thongs have engraved silver tips with cut-out framed scenes hanging from their points. The bolo clasps resemble picture frames or, in some instances, television screens with detailed images set three-dimensionally into the centers. In *Alligator/Poodle* the artist's irreverent sense of humor is clearly evident as an alligator sits grinning menacingly, a primped poodle clenched between his teeth, the focal point of the bolo clasp.

At first glance at *Howling*, you can almost hear the melodic twangs of some lonesome cowboy's song from the wide prairie. A second look reveals that the large, minutely detailed silver and gold brooch features a formalized portrait of, not Dale and Roy, but a male and female coyote. The happy couple, their muzzles raised in unison toward a gemstone moon that sits atop an archway of bones, is dressed in dude-ranch western attire; additional bones along with musical notes hang from the bottom of the frame.

The artist's special brand of satire coupled with an extraordinary eye for detail gives these pieces an individuality that immediately separates them from the coyote and cactus jewelry that has so completely saturated the mainstream market. Carson's ability to hone fine pieces from precious metals and semiprecious stones carries over to other objects as well. His *Cowboy Clock* is indicative of this quality of craftsmanship. Using silver, brass and copper, he has designed a functional object that retains the artist's sense of self. A coyote howling at the moon, rabbits scampering across the sand, a buzzard circling overhead and a skull lying amongst the sagebrush are all worked around the outer case of the clock, providing a fresh take on an old standard scenario, complete with a copper snake as the second hand.

Carson's reinterpretation of the ordinary, creating a new twist, is most obvious in his lamps. In *Cowboy Liberty Torch* he has taken many of the symbols associated with the Southwest, such as barbed wire, wood, goat horns and turquoise, and fashioned them into a functional totem. These homages to the lifestyles of the Southwest have been poked fun of with the discerning eye of a craftsman.

In addition to the southwestern themes, several of Carson's handmade pieces feature Alice-in-Wonderland characters, including a brooch entitled *Queen of Hearts on TV*. The television screen once again sets the stage for a highly satirized, cartoon-like image of a queen of hearts looming, three-dimensionally out from the screen. Crafted from silver and copper, the queen's portrait is set with tourmalines and garnets.

All of Carson's objects require careful scrutiny. The details incorporated in his pieces turn what seems to be the obvious into not-so-subtle satirizations of some of popular culture's most prevalent themes. The fact that his work is so successful relies as much on his technical skill as it does on the playfulness of his subject matter. So as the sun sinks slowly in the west and those old coyotes come out to howl, you can bet your boots that from the reception of Kit Carson's latest exhibition, he'll be hard at work saddling up for yet another exciting show of skill and craftsmanship.

Dorothy Spencer is an arts consultant and writer based in Philadelphia.

Letters continued from page 6

He then dismisses that endeavor as, at best, revealing that "there are no Paradises on earth." I was disturbed because that search for a more genuine experience is what still motivates my own work as an artist today.

"Primitive," as we often use it, is certainly more a term which expresses our desires and projections than one that denotes a historical cultural reality. But my opinion is that that may be a legitimate pursuit for the artist. Not foggy thinking based on imaginary data or misinterpreted information, but a depiction of today's desires and projections within a fictional landscape, taking the position of an "outsider" to our culture. It is an objectivity that we sometimes wish to take when being critical of our society, perhaps because it is that illusion of objectivity that science pretends to assume: that objectivity lends credibility. The fact that objectivity is part of the illusion doesn't necessarily make the observations faulty. If it did, then we could dismiss Leonardo's *The Last Supper*, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and Kurosawa's *The Seven Samarai.*

One of those desires or projections that artists imply through the neo-primitive is that there was once a time when we were closer to the earth, more in harmony with the environment. This myth may be only speculative or wishful thinking but it is nonetheless an important and timely topic worth artistic expression as well as critical analysis. If human beings are somehow less in tune with nature than our non-human fellows on this planet, then there was some kind of change in our consciousness, even if that was precisely our awareness of self. If primitive is a metaphor for "before the fall," then neo-primitive metalwork implies a concern for what we lost or have forgotten.

The ritual object without a ritual is certainly an anachronism. And it is the reason I stopped making pseudo-ritual objects. But if a ritual is an enactment of myth, then a preoccupation with ritual indicates a concern for our mythology. I also believe that artists often turn to the "primitive" because of the power we can still sense in its forms, as indications of the myths of the distant past. Joseph Campbell, in *Mythologies of the Primitive Hunters and Gatherers*, states, "The first function of a mythology is to waken and maintain in the individual a sense of wonder and participation in the mystery of this finally inscrutable universe." And in a culture in which getting a driver's license is our main rite of passage and Bart Simpson is a hero for our children, we are starved for a mythology that plays a vital role in our society. The neo-primitive ritual object expresses more need than solution. If artist, as shaman, makes the connection between this impermanent, sorrowful life of isolation and a larger reality, then ritual objects are her/his tools of the trade. A tool implies a task. A tool without a task is like determining without a goal. And that sounds very familiar to me.

Bruce's article mentions that the "primitivist tendency is roughly hewed forms, crusty finishes and generally low levels of craftsmanship. Here, the roughness stands for a complex analogy in which unpolished craft equals the ostensible emotional directness of a primitive culture, and controlled craft equals the imprisoned sick psyche of civilized society." An oversimplification, of course, but there may be some merit in the use of technique and style as metaphor for our emotional/intellectual condition. The Seto tea bowls, the Iga and Bizen water jars popularized by Furuta Oribe in 16th-century Japan expressed beauty in irregularity, asymmetry and roughness. And if a person has ever put a high polish on a piece of metal, they know that there is a certain mindless repetition that could justifiably be employed to symbolize meaningless or mechanized behavior.

Of course this rationale can also be used as an excuse for laziness or inability. One must be careful (and here, perhaps, is what Bruce is referring to) because non-literate cultures may have had unsophisticated tools by our standards, but this did not result in unsophisticated craftsmanship. Anyone who has tried to attach a stone arrowhead to a wood shaft so that it will sustain the speed and impact of the hunt will have renewed respect for "primitive" craftsmanship. If a primitive object was roughly hewed, you can be sure that that level of craftsmanship was appropriate for its function.

As far as contemporary artists not really understanding non-literate cultures, Bruce has an excellent point. And any presumption to claim such expertise must be done with caution. But that lack of knowledge is at least partially explained by the cultural chauvinism of our society and particularly the prejudices of our institutions of learning against non-European viewpoints over the past several hundred years. Perhaps the neo-primitives are bemoaning that fact and pointing toward a wisdom that has been too long neglected.

From the knowledge we do have, it does seem that pre-literate cultures were marked by rigid systems of behavior and thought. But there may also have been a certain freedom in knowing what should be done, how to be included in the community, and in what direction one's life should go. If our freedoms are defined by the mall and the living room, how does that compare? Are we free of circumscribed taboos, standards of behavior and networks of obligation? Maybe the neo-primitives question just how much progress we have made.

We no longer can posture ourselves behind a superior view of non-literate culture, nor can we pose as armchair anthropologists interpreting remote societies to suit our own purposes. On the other hand, I am all for rejecting the illusions of modern life in a search for more genuine experience. And I disagree that, at best, those artists who do will learn that there are no Paradises on earth. We may just discover that, through the direct experience of modern life, that is exactly where Paradise lies.

Harlan W. Butt, Denton, TX

Dear Editor:

I am writing to announce a new service being offered to all *Metalsmith* subscribers. It is now possible to have a Society of North American Goldsmiths MasterCard.

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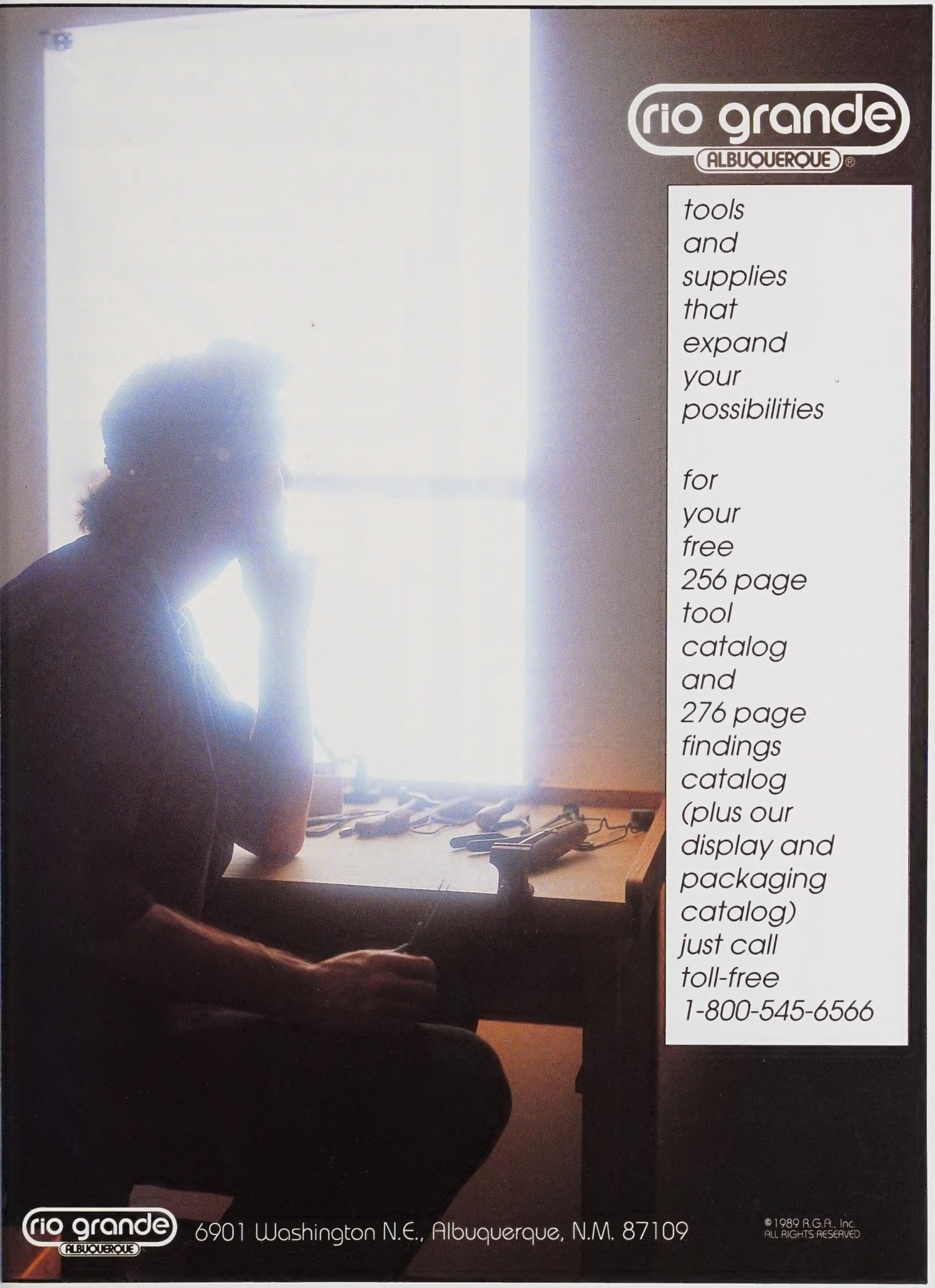
Each member/subscriber will shortly receive a detailed letter/application from Trans National Financial Services explaining just how these service benefits work.

The Board of Directors has examined this service and feels it is a solid opportunity to enhance the endowment. We encourage all members/subscribers to examine this proposal and, if you like it, drop one of your other cards, as I am doing, and become a Society of North American Goldsmiths cardholder.

Walter Soellner, Treasurer, SNAG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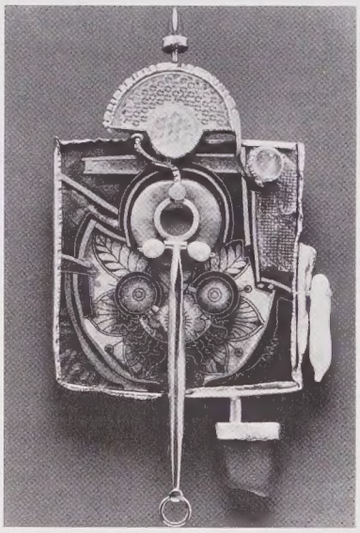

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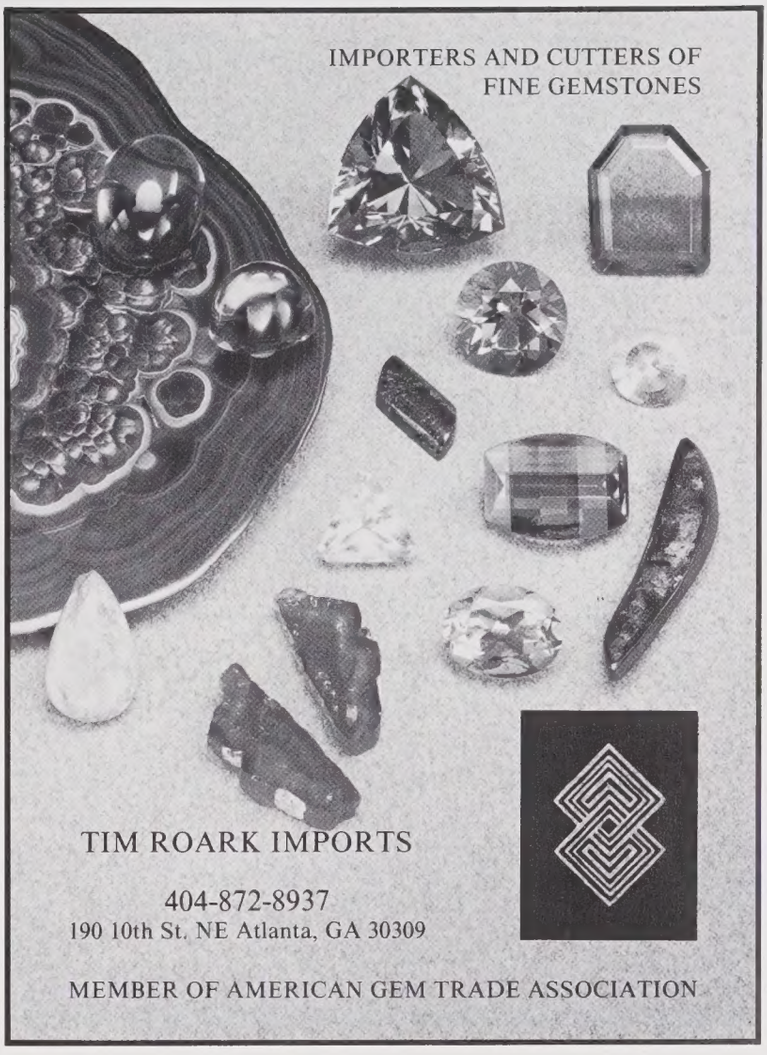

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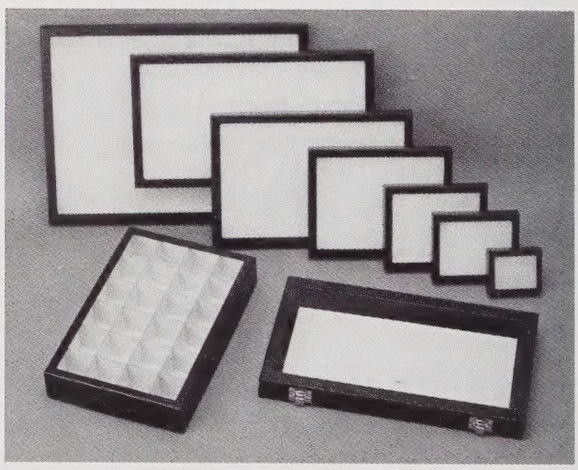

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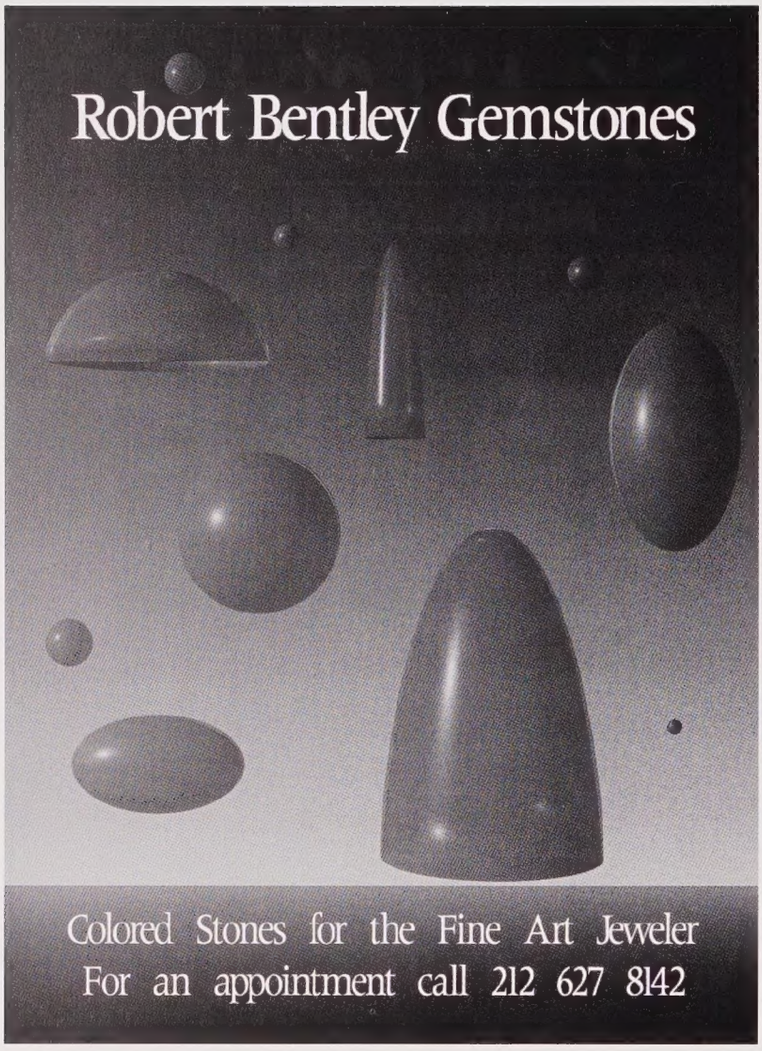

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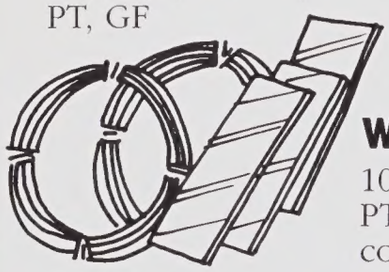

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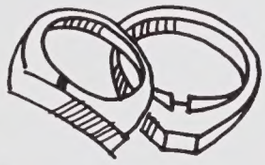

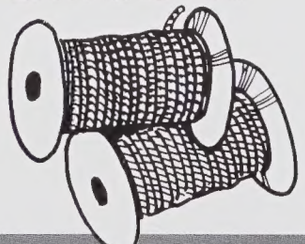

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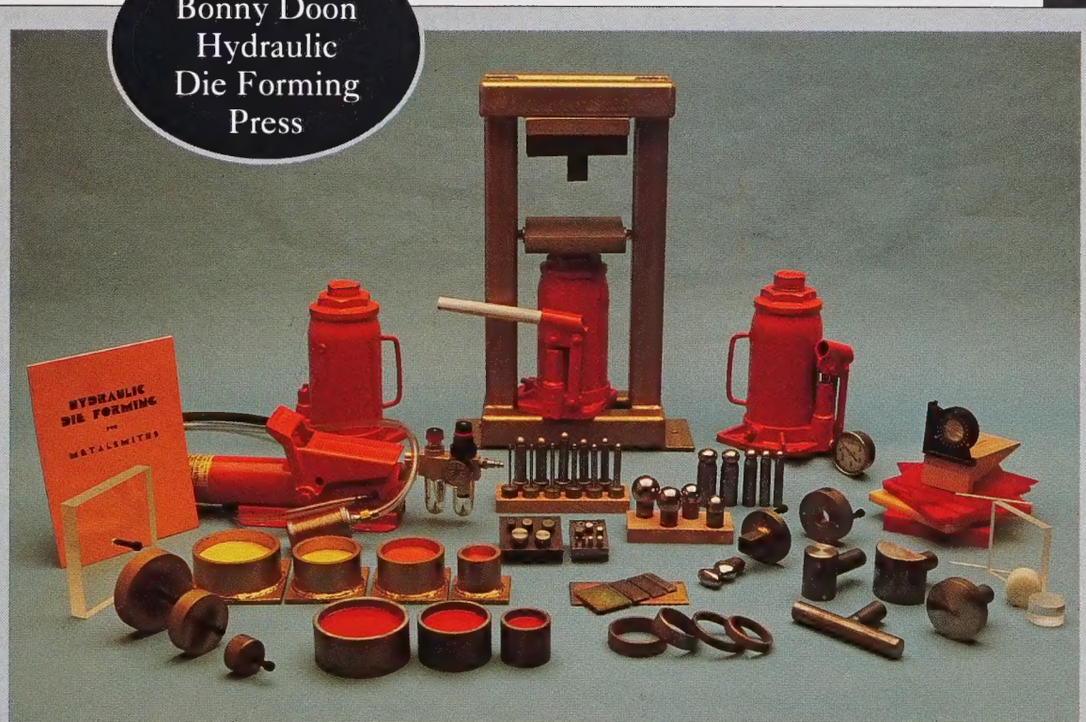

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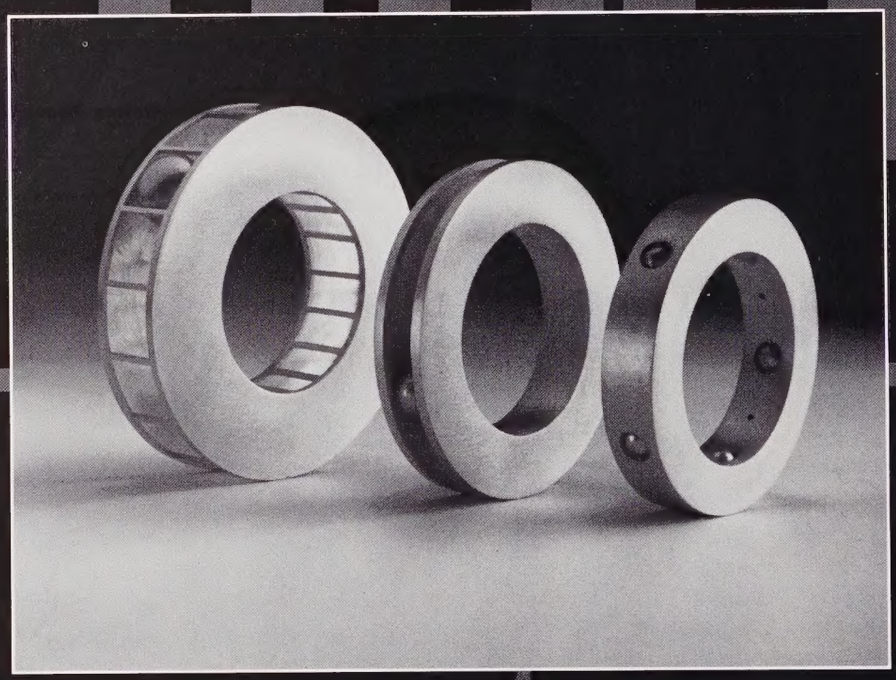

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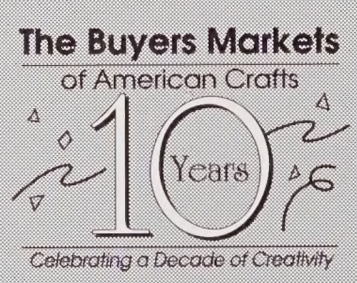

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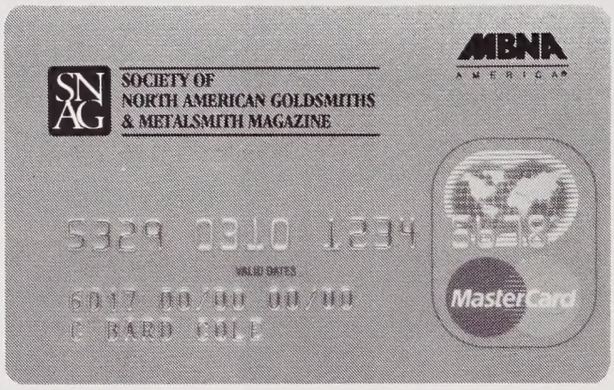

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65-141
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ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

HOME PHONE ( ) _____ BUS. PHONE ( ) _____

ARE YOU: ☐ Renting ☐ Own ☐ Buying Monthly Payment $ _____

SOCIAL SECURITY # _____

DATE OF BIRTH _____

PRESENT EMPLOYER _____

NATURE OF BUSINESS _____

POSITION _____

YEARS THERE _____ ANNUAL INCOME $ _____

OTHER INCOME* $ _____

SOURCE _____

*(Alimony, child support, or separate maintenance income need not be revealed if you do not wish it considered as a basis of repayment.)

PREVIOUS EMPLOYER _____
(If less than 3 years at current employment.)

PREVIOUS ADDRESS _____
(If at present address less than 3 years.)

MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME _____
(For use when you request special action taken on your account.)

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X _____ (Seal)
APPLICANT'S SIGNATURE Date

CO-APPLICANT SECTION (Please print)

Use this section to request extra cards. If you wish an additional card issued to a co-applicant over 18 years of age, complete the information below.

CO-APPLICANT'S NAME AS YOU WOULD LIKE IT TO APPEAR ON CARD

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EMPLOYER _____ YRS. THERE _____

POSITION _____ ANNUAL SALARY $ _____

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(Seal)

X _____
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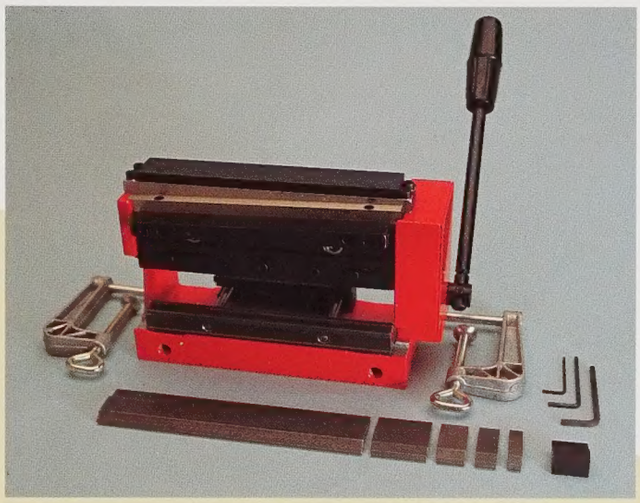

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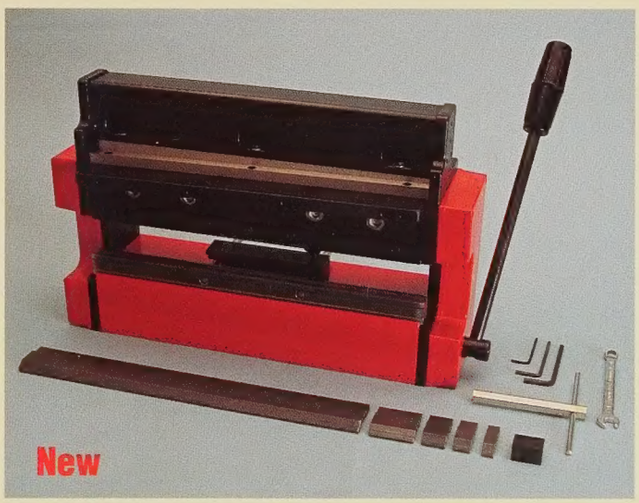

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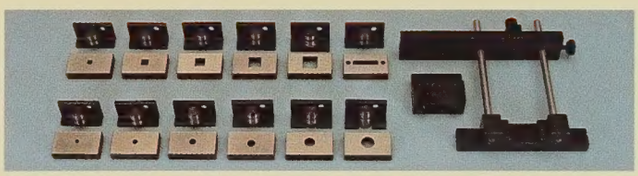

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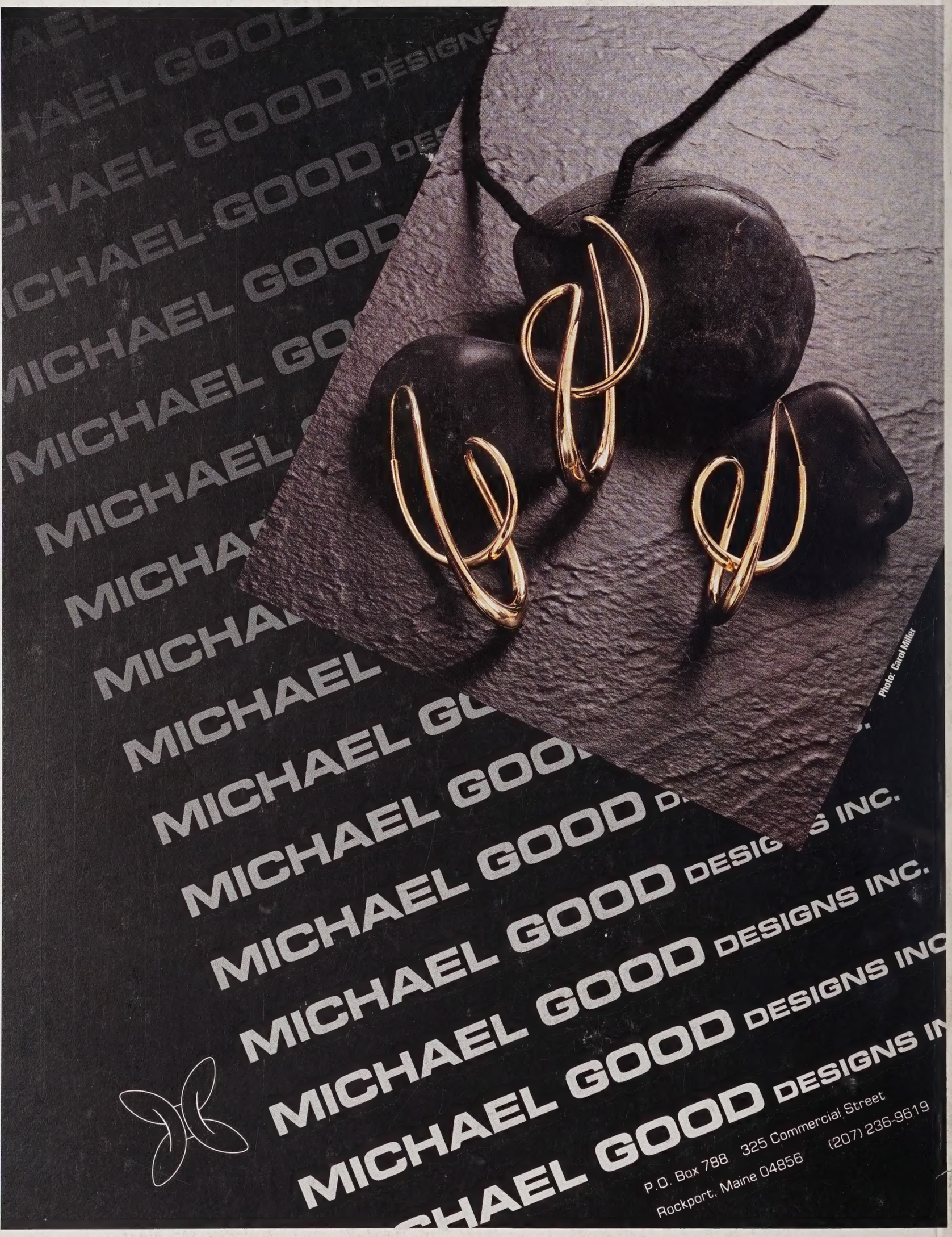
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